



At the Mercedes Championship in 2004, played at the Kapalua Resort in Hawaii, Davis Love III recorded the longest official drive in PGA history—476 yards.

teaching pro at an indoor practice facility in Michigan. “I got a lot of publicity out of that. Joe DiMaggio was in the crowd and told the papers that I ought to be put in a cage. There were newspapers all over the world that ran the story. It led to a career I never thought I would have. I was putting on exhibitions for \$1,500, which was serious cash at that time, and \$6,000 when I quit 10 years later. It was first-class air, hotel suites. It was amazing how just hitting the ball far drew everyone to you.”

Sellinger knew he was a long hitter when he was a junior. “It was God’s gift to me; my ball just went farther,” he says. When *Golf Digest* picked up on the long drive craze and sponsored a championship, Sellinger won it twice. His success spawned a business for him, of exhibitions and clinics, of showing off at Fortune 500 company outings and creating events like the RE/MAX World Long Drive Championship, considered the official competition to determine the world’s longest driver. The winning drive in this event often approaches 400 yards hitting to flat ground with USGA conforming clubs. Despite his own prodigious talent, Sellinger thanks John Daly for making big hitting legitimate.

“People went bonkers when John won the PGA,” says Sellinger. “It just opened so many doors for people who could hit it, gave it a legitimacy. It meant that we could actually have a sport within a sport. You know, for the Tour, John was crazy long then, and he’s still superlong

now. But for us he isn’t. Our players are good players with good swings who condition themselves to hit it long.”

The Cobra golf company sponsors a long-distance driving team of which Sellinger is a part along with four-time long driving champion Jason Zuback of Calgary, Canada, who also happens to be a licensed pharmacist. Zuback’s longest drive in competition is 412 yards, 3 feet, 3.5 inches. He knows that by heart. “I’ve hit it over 500 in certain conditions,” says Zuback. “It’s a gift to me, a natural ability that I’ve taken to another level. I’ve been able to make a career out of it, which shows how much people love to see a player hit it long.” Zuback, like so many of the long hitters, was once challenged by an amateur for money. Zuback hit first. The amateur backed out of the bet.

The Long Drivers of America has adopted rules that correspond to USGA rules for drivers. Among the many specifications, a driver head must not exceed 460 cubic centimeters. The USGA limits the coefficient of restitution, the trampoline effect of the clubface itself, expressed as a figure of .830. The height of the clubface, from the sole to the crown, cannot exceed 2.8 inches, while the distance from the heel to the toe cannot exceed five inches in length. The same five-inch standard applies to the width of the club head as it applies to the clubface to the back. The USGA and the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews have jointly adopted the same specifications for drivers and publish a list of conforming drivers annually.

Among those drivers (with names like Nike’s Sasquatch, what does that tell you?) are clubs produced by Jim Yeh’s Alpha Golf Co. in Chatsworth, California. His Alpha C830, and versions of it, are used in many long-distance competitions. It’s through the big hitters at these competitions that Yeh gets the word out about his drivers. A Taiwanese with a degree in physics from the University of Rochester, Yeh sells about 50,000 drivers a year for around \$300 apiece. Though his company also produces irons and fairway woods, Yeh has found a niche for himself in the long driving market. “Hitting long brings joy to a lot of people,” says Yeh. “Especially to senior players. Our drivers allow them to keep up.”

The USGA has an Overall Distance Standard, first adopted in 1976 and pegged then at a total of 297 yards, including rollout. The USGA’s current standard is 320 yards using a 120-mile-per-hour swing speed at its testing facility in Far Hills, New Jersey. “We are satisfied with the standard,” says Ruge. “But we are always evaluating whether we should go to a ball that doesn’t fly as far. There has been talk of

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having a different ball for tournament play, but the USGA has always operated under one set of rules for the best players and for the everyday players. The main reason we don’t go to a shorter ball is that golfers don’t want it.”

Ever hear a 20-handicapper say he would like to hit it shorter? Or a 10 or a five, or even a scratch? The new drivers, at the very least, allow less accomplished players to still move the ball a respectable distance when they don’t make contact with the center of the clubhead.