

FIELDREPORT

SkyTrak- The UK market has its say

Launched by SkyCaddie in the UK in late 2015, the SkyTrak offers professional launch monitor capabilities, plus high-resolution golf simulator entertainment, for just £1,695.

Does this unprecedented price point signal a new era of affordable launch monitors? And will we all soon be playing indoor golf on the club TV? SGB Golf speaks to the first UK SkyTrak users....

It arrived from the United States with the usual fanfare, and on the back of a decade's worth of market-leading SkyCaddie achievements in the GPS world - but what do the actual users think of the new SkyTrak?

The £1,695 SkyTrak first surfaced at the 2015 PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, immediately creating a strong buzz. A photometric launch monitor claiming to be as accurate as far more expensive competition, combined with the abilities of a golf simulator worth tens of thousands of dollars? Surely it wouldn't be any good? In the UK, we had a few months to wait to find out.

When it finally arrived after European CE testing, in November 2015, SkyCaddie already had a bulging order book for SkyTrak - after almost a year of anticipation, and a show-stealing appearance in October at The Golf Show in Harrogate. Units left the Haddenham, Bucks warehouse almost as fast as they arrived on the lorry.

An announcement soon followed about integrating with the world's leading golf simulator software companies, with golf clubs soon realising that SkyTrak's relative affordability meant state-of-the-art indoor golf on their own TVs was now possible. In bad weather and at night, golf club bars and function rooms began to fill up with SkyTrak golfers patiently waiting their turn.

And then in December 2015, SkyCaddie scooped a major award for SkyTrak, Best Consumer Golf Tech in the influential MyGolfSpy Awards, voted for by writers at one of America's most influential golf websites.

With early reports from the USA hailing SkyTrak as a true breakthrough - effectively making launch monitors affordable at last, with the simulator functions also a huge bonus - UK customers finally began to unpack their own SkyTraks towards the end of November 2015.

We spoke to a few of the UK's SkyTrak pioneers, to hear their early thoughts.

John King, Lindrick Golf Club

SkyTrak's arrival persuaded Lindrick's head PGA professional John King to buy the club's first-ever professional-standard launch monitor. "I had looked at them before but had been deterred by cost. Although I focus mainly on coaching, we also do custom-fitting and retailing, but the high price of other systems didn't make sense for us as regards cash outlay versus sales margin coming back again.

"SkyTrak's price finally made it possible, and my early impression is that I would most definitely recommend it to other golf pros. Looking at the comparisons I have made, SkyTrak's statistics are very good. It gives great credibility when you are custom-fitting, and my customers no longer need to go elsewhere for the full launch-monitor experience.

"In use, it is fantastically portable. The protective case is very useful, and on the range you're set up and ready to hit balls in under a minute. I link our SkyTrak to my iPad, and customers can see their shot data more or less instantly. It's easy to use too - just place your ball on the red dot.

"We haven't used it indoors yet at Lindrick, but that's where SkyTrak will really impress and entertain as a golf simulator I think, especially



on a bigger screen.

"SkyCaddie has a great reputation for quality, which reassured me when considering the purchase, and they have lived up to that reputation with SkyTrak.

"I can see us using the SkyTrak on a daily basis, with great confidence, this season."

Andrew Smith, York Driving Range

Andrew Smith is part of the Foremost buying group at York Driving Range. A full-time golf coach, he had a unique approach to SkyTrak. "A lot of pros will look at SkyTrak as a fitting tool," he said, "but as soon as I saw it I thought that my junior pupils would love it - and I was right.

"Today's children are very comfortable interacting with screens, and as I teach 100 kids a week the SkyTrak has quickly become one of the most popular attractions here at York Driving Range among our young golfers. They love interacting with the screen, and we've even had the local newspaper come to do an article about the SkyTrak.

"A key factor for me is the price. If I'd bought one of SkyTrak's far more expensive rivals such as GC2 or Trackman, I would have had to raise my tuition prices to recoup the cost. But SkyTrak's low price means that I can invest in my business, and offer a great launch-monitor and simulator experience - including fun and

games as well as shot-tracking data - without raising my prices at all. Kids and especially their parents love that fact, of course!



"Using SkyTrak, a pupil can hit the ball, watch the flight and then look at the screen within three seconds to see exactly how far it has gone. With kids we tend to have an initial serious session, followed by a Chocolate Bar Challenge using its Nearest the Pin feature and other fun games.

"I will be upgrading to the full simulator experience shortly, too.

"As for club-fitting, I personally changed my PING irons after working through my clubs on SkyTrak, and it will play a part in most club-fitting sessions from now on.

"SkyTrak is a tremendous product, and has been a great success here so far. The distances are spot-on, it's very easy to use, and the price point is unbeatable."

Joel Tadman, Golf Monthly magazine

Joel Tadman was one of the first British golf journalists to receive a SkyTrak for long-term media testing. "For the price, you get a lot for your money with SkyTrak," he said. "In the short time I've been using it in my equipment reviews, I have been suitably impressed by the device overall. It's extremely easy to set up: once you've created a SkyGolf account it takes less than 30 seconds to start recording shots on the range and the data seems to stack up with clubs through the bag.

"The shot graphics and data displays are clear and simple to evaluate, and the post-session data analysis software has improved significantly in recent months."

Tom Atkinson, Heswall Golf Club

Tom Atkinson, head PGA professional at Heswall Golf Club on the Wirral, spoke after becoming one of the first UK customers to receive and install SkyTrak at his club. "In just the first week, I used SkyTrak to do a gap wedge fitting and to entertain a group of golfers with a Nearest the Pin challenge when the course was temporarily closed. We've already sold one SkyTrak to a member, with another group pledging to club together to buy one for shared use.

"Golfers were initially apprehensive about accuracy, but we found its numbers matched those which people had experienced on Trackman, which is way more costly.

"The graphics are simply stunning. It is small and neat as a unit, and we easily hooked it up to our big TV with a Lightning cable. We had no problem running the WGT Golf sim software, which looks incredible and very lifelike, and the shot info appears on-screen almost instantly.

"Also, as there are no cameras to set up, it's a piece of cake to switch it for a left-hander to use.

"It's an incredibly good piece of kit which we will use a lot this winter, let alone during the season. I already feel that SkyTrak is adding value to our memberships at Heswall, which is absolutely crucial these days."

Tom Field, The Wychwood Golf Club

Tom Field, head professional at The Wychwood Golf Club in the Cotswolds, is another early adopter who predicts frequent SkyTrak sessions at his club in 2016. "In the first week or so, I would say that we've sold five extra sets of golf clubs because we had a SkyTrak on hand, so it's been a revolution already in that respect.

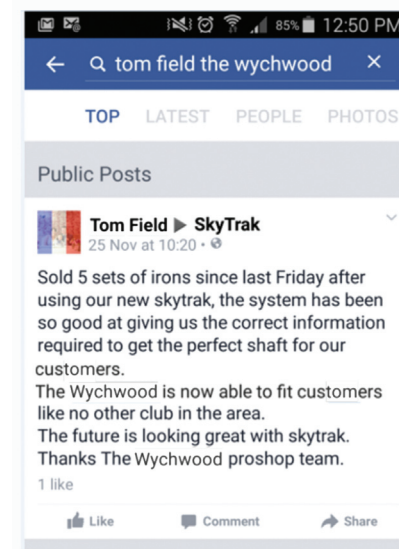
"It is a very good selling tool. One great thing, from a retail point of view, is that it clarifies what

you are saying to a customer while selling equipment. The SkyTrak data isn't so complex that the golfer can't understand it, which is what I have seen with other far higher-priced launch monitors, but it lacks for nothing in terms of what you actually need to know.

"I already view our SkyTrak as essential for our custom-fitting operation here.

"Trackman is very desirable, but is far too expensive for a business like ours, and its data goes over some people's heads. As for GC2 and Flightscope, I feel that SkyTrak does what they do, equally as well, but at a fraction of the price. It is very affordable, and also very accurate - so I don't feel that it is compromised by its relatively low price point.

"We are also going to use the simulator functions, particularly when the weather is bad. Bring the guys down to the golf club, we'll turn the heating on, and let's all play an exotic golf course on a horrible winter's day!"



"Too many golfers get out of the habit of visiting the golf club during spells of bad weather, and I think SkyTrak will turn that around.

"It will help us to expand the business, as it means that our golf club can offer a buying and entertainment experience which the internet cannot offer - let alone other golf clubs nearby.

"I can see us using SkyTrak a huge amount in 2016."



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