



Brett Tucker – Managing Director of PGF.

Golf equipment company PGF is a local icon and as, Mark Harding reports, it's still going strong after all these years.

**Y**ou can have your Victor Kiams and your Rupert Murdochs – give me the story of Brett Tucker any day. Kiam was the man who, famously, liked the Remington product so much that he bought the company. And, of course, Rupert has liked an awful lot of newspapers and television networks in his day too. It's been easy for them to indulge themselves... because they could afford to do so.

But Brett Tucker also saw a company and liked it so much he wanted to buy it – it's just that it was a long and interesting journey from the assembly plant to the boardroom.

Now, at 38, he is the managing director and major shareholder of PGF – the iconic Australasian golf equipment company which gave

him his start in both golf and life more than 25 years ago.

Tucker was a promising, big-hitting amateur golfer who, like many teenagers over the years, got his first encouragement in the game through some junior development tournaments sponsored by PGF.

The company, formed in Sydney in 1932, became a world leader in golf-club technology in the 1960s with the design of the world's first parallel tip iron shaft and the introduction of the famous 'Little Slammer', the grandfather of today's trendy rescue clubs.

But through all of its ups (and occasional downs) PGF has always had a community culture, providing assistance to countless thousands of young golf hopefuls. The odd glove and a

**THE PGF STORY**

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## Over the years PGF has been known for innovative advertising with a focus on technology and innovation.

couple of golf balls doesn't sound much, but you never know when it is going to inspire the next Greg Norman to stick at the game.

It certainly kept Tucker interested and, as he developed his amateur career, reaching scratch and winning club and provincial championships, he began working at the Christchurch plant of PGF. At first it was doing odd jobs after school before moving to Auckland to take up a sales position in the business.

He left PGF for a few years when he had Sales and Marketing roles with New Zealand companies National Provident and then New Zealand Breweries, but he never lost his feeling for his golfing employer and he never forgot the ambitious claim to a colleague, as an obstinate teenager, that he would one day prove himself by owning the company.

He returned as New Zealand national sales manager and within a short period was appointed as general manager of New Zealand with a concurrent position of marketing manager with PGF International. He then went on to be appointed GM of Australia and New Zealand.

When he eventually took over the company, pure fate produced a remarkable reunion involving the colleague in whom he had confided all those years ago.

"You would not believe it, but when I stepped off the plane from finalising the purchase of PGE, I bumped into that very person at the airport," he recalls.

"We hadn't seen each other for all those years but we recognised each other and I said 'you won't believe what I have just done.'"

Tucker set about returning PGF to its glory days, but always

determined he would continue its traditional culture as a company which understands golfers and nurtures the game. Often neglected portions of the market are now being catered for, with specific PGF brands such as Lady Futura, left-hand-only Southpaw and Future Star Junior's range becoming market leaders.

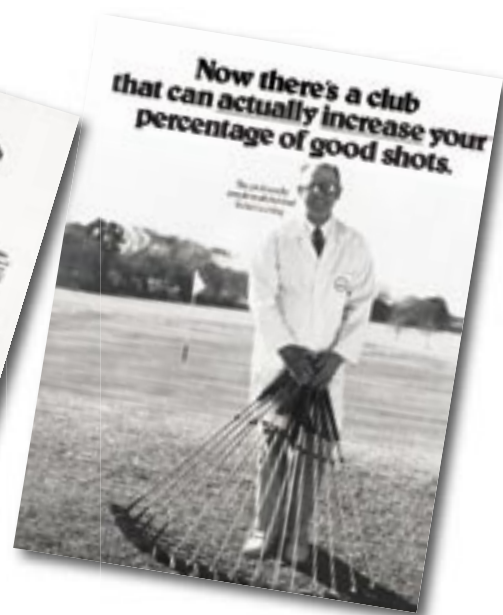
Tucker's philosophy is that PGF is a company that is sold on selling innovation, performance, enjoyment and representing great value.

If we were honest, all of us would admit to a bit of golf snobbery at times, but Tucker does not apologise for the fact that PGF products are not priced at the top of the range. He insists the technology and innovation which took it to the top in the '60s has never waned. Since then major international companies have been formed with massive marketing budgets. "But they don't own innovation. We continue to utilise the latest design technology and material available to product development. And just because our equipment doesn't cost as much, it doesn't mean we haven't got the same thing or better."

And it's not just clubs. Tucker is about to introduce a marketing campaign with Optima golf balls which focuses on the value of the ball. Priced around \$5.50, the successful Optima TS (Tour Soft) is about \$4 less than the most expensive balls.

"We are saying that twice as much does not necessarily mean twice as good!" he says.

This year is the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the Optima brand and earlier in the year the 50-millionth Optima golf ball rolled down the production line. For a local ball against the big international



LEFT: PGF has a long history of encouraging young talent – including Bradley Hughes.

names, it has been an astonishing success story and one which follows the traditions set in the early days.

A nostalgic look at PGF shows how innovative the company has been. Formed as East Brothers in 1932, it produced the Starline and PowerPact golf clubs until it merged with Chesterfield in 1959 to become Precision Golf Forging.

At that time PGF was one of only two companies in the world to concentrate on custom-fitting clubs. Until then most golfers bought clubs off the rack but PGF used a marketing philosophy which said "If your game doesn't measure up, maybe your clubs weren't."

Peter Thomson was strongly connected with PGF throughout the period of his five British Opens, even though he was contracted to Dunlop. In fact a PGF model was produced bearing his name.

The biggest coup for the company was when PGF advisory staff player Kel Nagle won the 1960 Centenary British Open. He also tied for the US Open in 1965, only to lose in the play-off to Gary Player. In 1962, Australian Open winner Eric Cremin designed the "Little Slammer" and it became without question the most successful club in PGF's history.

The rescue clubs of today are descendants of this remarkable little wood, but other manufacturers would soon be following another PGF innovation when design guru Ernest Kermeth came up with the world's first parallel tip iron shaft.

Forged-headed clubs were used on the US Tour by New Zealander John Lister.

With Lister, Nagle and double Australian Open winner Frank Phillips singing their praise, the Status irons were also making inroads on the international scene, especially after the 1972 introduction of Status Mark III, the first-ever heel-toe peripheral-weighted iron.

In 1974 PGF was taken over by Colgate Palmolive and history will say that the corporate giant did not understand the PGF culture and the company lost its way. Australian businessman Kerry Stokes brought it back under an Australasian

umbrella four years later before selling it to Singapore's Haw Par. Now under Tucker, PGF has shifted from its original factory to a new Sydney facility in Alexandria. As well as major internal re-structuring, the Optima Soft Core ball has been introduced, along with a full technical upgrade of the existing Optima ball range. The new Status PWT model boasts the latest weight technology in the world whilst new products such as a range of hybrid wood-irons and the soon-to-be-released V8 driver look to dominate the local market.

Throughout the PGF journey, the company has been able to not only encourage young professional golfers but has developed other industry talent. Greg Norman worked at the Queensland warehouse as a youngster. Others to have either worked or played with PGF product over the years include Nagle, Phillips, Lister, David Graham, Michael Campbell, Simon Owen, Paul Gow, Rod Pampling, Brad Hughes and many more. Tom Crow worked there before leaving to establish Cobra. Bill Bosley cut his teeth there before running Titleist Australia.

It's the understanding of the game that drew Tucker back to it. PGF has always been in business to make money, but the brand has made a contribution to the game on all levels in Australia and New Zealand that shouldn't just be measured by the balance sheet.

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