

Tweaked for performance

Ian McKenzie talks to the racket specialists at Wigmore Sports and finds out what is new on the squash scene this season

If you want a better squash racket, spending more money is not necessarily the answer.

Major changes to racket design are now unlikely, with most products being tweaked from previous designs, although Prince is promising more when its latest offering is released soon.

Rowan Davada, manager of Wigmore Sports, London's premier rackets store, explains that most of Wigmore's rackets are in the £70-£170 price range, although they sometimes promote exclusive models.

He admits that Wigmore is not the cheapest store, but that it does offer very good advice,

At one stage the trend was for very light rackets, but this policy was then moderated. However, they are now becoming lighter again. Lighter rackets have some advantages, as they are easier for pick-up, but they tend to be more expensive.

easier to use, whereas the traditional shape gives more control.

Davada says players trust the main brands, so this is where his racket experts start when advising customers and then they lay out the options.

There are tweaks being made to the material used to make rackets and new forms of graphite are being innovated.

Head, for example, has developed Graphline XT, a refinement of its popular Graphline material.

Prince's new material is called Textreme, which is already used in its tennis range. "It feels nice and solid, and is not hard on the arm," says Davada. He also



matching the characteristics of a client's game with the attributes of the racket, and after-care.

Most of Wigmore's clients in London fall into two groups – young professionals under the age of 25 who are price-sensitive and looking for a deal, and the 40-plus group who will splash out on a quality frame. Interestingly, there is little in between.

Unfortunately, you can only decide whether it is worth buying a new racket by trying it out, but you will probably find it is only marginally different from a previous model. Fortunately, Wigmore has a squash court hitting area in its store.

"You need to put more technology into a lighter racket," explains Davada, who revealed that Wigmore sells most rackets in the 110-125g range.

There are also more open-throat rackets entering the market. These have the advantage of being powerful and

accepts that Dunlop rackets are good quality and value, but that the public may head to SportsDirect for the best deals on these.

WIGMORE SPORTS

Wigmore Sports is a racket specialist store stocking over 2,000 rackets. It can be found at 39 Wigmore Street, London W1U 1PD.

Racket review 2015

RADIUM EVOLUTION AT BLACK KNIGHT

Black Knight rackets, distributed in the UK by Goode Sports, which is also the distributor of Ashaway strings, has launched the Ion Radium PSX for the new season.

The Radium is an evolution of the popular Galaxy PS racket. It uses the same bridged frame shape and size, but weighs another 5g at 140g with a head light balance. This gives it a solid feel while allowing quick racket-work.

David Palmer, the elder statesman in the Black Knight stable, uses the Ion X Force Black, having formerly used the distinctive golden Ion Storm, while England international Daryl Selby uses the customised Ion Element PSX Selby.

TECNIFIBRE MOVES TO TEARDROPS

Tecnifibre says more players are moving to the teardrop shape of the Carboflex range. It finds the popular racket weight range now is 120g to 130g with a central to head light balance. The advantage is that it allows players to shorten their swing and increase the head speed of the racket, which suits the style of world no.1 Mohamed Elshorbagy and is behind the new Carboflex racket launched earlier this year.

Tecnifibre's James Fenton says: "Elshorbagy has been playing with Tecnifibre rackets since he was 16 and has relied on them all the way to achieving his world no.1 ranking."

Tecnifibre has three categories of racket – the top-selling Carboflex; the Suprem range, which features the classic round-head shape geared towards the traditional players looking for ultimate control; and the Dynergy line, which is aimed at the progressive player looking for a racket to help generate power.

HARROW PLAYERS LEAVE VAPOR TRAIL

Harrow has four prime ranges, each with its own profile – the Jonathon Power, Stealth, Vapor and Silk.

The best-selling Vapor range was originally launched eight years ago. The Stealth range, light but head heavy, was launched three years ago and is now the signature racket of Dutch no.1 Laurens Jan Anjema. This uses the traditional Vapor shape, but utilises new materials. The new model is the Laurens Jan Anjema Custom Pro Series Stealth.

Harrow has also introduced a new teardrop-shaped racket, the Silk. The 140g (strung) racket comes with even balance and is very stiff to provide power. This racket, brought out to develop Harrow's teardrop range, has become the

choice of Harrow's two most recently-signed PSA players, Egyptian duo Tarek Momen and Marwan Elshorbagy.

Harrow has an extensive stable of professional players, including Egypt's new world no.1, Raneem El Welily.

NEW FORCE AT DUNLOP

Dunlop has introduced the new Force series of rackets for the 2015/16 season with an emphasis on faster head speed and power.

The Force consists of two new aerodynamic families, the Hybrid Evolution and Revelation teardrop. These new series use Hyperfibres in the shaft, which is said to increase stiffness for greater energy return.

The Evolution has two new models, the 120g and 130g, with triple world champion Nick Matthew choosing the lighter version. The Englishman says: "The Force Evolution 120 is perfectly balanced for early racket preparation and adds the explosive power to my shots."

France's Gregory Gaultier and Diego Elias, Peru's world junior champion, use the Biometric Elite GTS. These are the established rackets in the Biomimetic collection.

"These successful models are the classic control frames that have been so successful for Dunlop over the years," said Dunlop spokesman Stephen Heatley.

QUALITY AND PRICE AT MANTIS

Mantis presents a simple range of rackets with a simple ethos – "exceptional quality products at affordable prices". Four of its six rackets come at a suggested retail price of less than £100.

In 2015 Mantis introduced its second generation of rackets with updated cosmetics and tweaks to enhance playability, but essentially with Mantis you are getting a tried and tested product.

The Power 110-II and the Power 130-II are the updated models. All Mantis rackets come strung in the multi-filament Mantis Tour response black 1.22 string.

Emma Beddoes (world no.13) uses the Mantis Power 110, while Eddie Charlton (world no.54) uses the Mantis Power 110-II.

"The feedback we get is that players like the balance and feel of the rackets, and they are very durable," said Mantis spokesman Shaun Crampton.

RAMY LEADS WAY AT PRINCE

Prince – the racket used by top pros Ramy Ashour, Nicol David and James Willstrop – will launch a new collection of rackets early next year.

Behind the launch is a new technology

that will allow a lighter frame with improved torsional stability (i.e. reduced racket twisting), giving greater power and accuracy, as well as improved durability. The secret is Textreme technology, which uses new lighter composite materials, allowing lighter rackets and strengthening in key areas.

Triple world champion Ashour is now using the new Pro Warrior 600, which is engineered specifically to his required specifications. This is the model he used in return to competition when he won the NetSuite Open in San Francisco. It will be publicly available at the start of 2016.

What do the players like about Prince rackets? "Definitely the feel," says Prince spokesman Jon Ballardie.

HEAD GOES FOR MATERIAL LIFT

GrapheneXT, the new generation of Graphene technology, is used in the new Head rackets. This shifts the weighting more towards the tip and handle of the frame. The advantage is to give an even lighter and stronger frame.

This new material has been used in the new Graphene XT Xenon 120 and 130 Slimbody rackets. The slim body beam is said to create a very aerodynamic shape for maneuverability and ease of ball retrieval close to the wall. The heavier of the two Slimbody frames allows for increased control and accuracy.

World no.7 Omar Mosaad, who uses the Xenon 135, and former world champion Laura Massaro (Xenon2 135) lead the Head stable – backed up by rising English player Adrian Waller (Cyano 135) and Egyptian world no.8, Nour El Tayeb (Cyano2 115).

DESSOUKI LINES UP FOR EYE

Eye Rackets has confirmed the signing of Egypt's Fares Dessouki on a three-year contract.

The upwardly mobile 21-year-old, who already has one PSA World Tour title to his name, will play with the Eye Rackets V.Lite 120 Control.

Eye ambassador Joey Barrington said: "Dessouki is one of the most explosive and fearless players in the world, making him a great signing for Eye."

The company offers four models: two traditional and two teardrop shapes. Each model comes in two weights with a head light and even balanced option. There is also a head-heavy option with the Borja Golan X.Lite 130 Control.

The Eye rackets stable comprises four-time world champion Amr Shabana, Spanish no.1 Borja Golan, Dessouki, world no.20 Mazen Hesham and six-time British Open winner Jonah Barrington.