



PRESS BRIEFING DOCUMENT
(BRAND HISTORY)

Honma Golf: The Story So Far

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 15 FEB 2005

Contact: Andy Hiseman, Hiseman Limited, 07734 936126 (www.hiseman.com/honma.htm)

Honma will be a new name to many golfers as it returns to the UK market in 2005.

But to a large number of golfers worldwide, particularly in the Far East and the USA, Honma represents the ultimate in golf equipment as regards both quality and price.

To understand Honma, which is 100% focused on golf, it is useful to know its history.

The Honma Golf Co. Ltd is based in Sakata, on Japan's west coast around 200 miles north of Tokyo. Its factory there is the largest golf production facility in Japan. The Honma family, one of Japan's most prominent, have played a large role in the growth of the traditional port of Sakata since the 16th Century. Their story is not one of blue-bloods but one of merchants, working remarkably hard and generating great wealth and power, both commercial and political. During the 18th Century, income from their shipping and banking businesses enabled them to become Japan's wealthiest land-owners.

In 1813 the Honma family built a summer residence in Sakata. After the Second World War this was renovated and turned into a private Museum, with many historic art treasures. It is now one of the City of Sakata's main tourist attractions. Sakata itself grew to become a prominent commercial shipping port of 100,000 inhabitants at the mouth of the Sea Of Japan, and these days the Honma family – now focused on producing the world's finest golf equipment – is the town's biggest employer.

The legendary wealth of the Honma family has been immortalised in Japanese folk songs. In so many ways, Honma is quite unique ...

The 1950s

Golf has become a sport beloved of Japan's super-rich. The Honma brothers, both devoted golfers, open the Tsurumi Golf Centre in Yokohama. From their single driving range grows the company which today produces the world's most prestigious golf clubs.

The 1960s

The brothers start Honma Golf Club Manufacturing Co. Hiro Honma, who will go on to be the main driving force behind the company, formulates a plan to make Honma golf clubs unlike any others. They dedicate themselves to learning the craftsmanship skills involved in making every single part of a golf club – the clubhead, the shaft and the grip - and develop their belief that 'a golf club is a work of art'. They also start to experiment with alternatives to steel in their golf club shafts. They develop an uncompromising commitment to crafting stunning high-performance golf equipment of the highest quality that the current technology will allow, no matter what the end cost.

Over 40 years later in 2005, this dedication to cutting-edge, hand-crafted precision Japanese manufacturing methods still remains the core statement about the Honma brand, and is the key reason why the Honma range is the world's most expensive.

The 1970s

Their research on golf club shafts pays off, and in 1973 Honma breaks new ground by offering black carbon graphite shafts as an alternative to steel shafts in its golf clubs. In 1976, the Honma brand that we recognise today – the 'Mole In The Hole' emerging from the O of HONMA – first appears. By now, the Honma range includes apparel as well as golf clubs and shafts. By the end of the 70s sales volumes are high but the company does not adopt many of the mass-production methods used by other large-volume golf manufacturers. Instead, a culture of craftsman-and-apprentice develops at the company. All golf clubs are finished by hand, and Honma works as hard on training its skilled craftsmen as it does on refining its shafts and clubheads.

The 1980s

Production moves to the family's home town of Sakata, and the decade sees the Honma Golf factory grow until it becomes the coastal city's largest employer. Honma's persimmon woods win acclaim worldwide as the finest ever made, and achieve many Tour wins – Lee Trevino's 1984 US PGA victory prominent amongst them. Honma's technicians continue to experiment with new materials, and fundamentally improve the performance of carbon graphite shafts in golf clubs. Another division of the company continues to develop its golf real estate interests, and Honma Golf opens a network of its own retail stores across Japan.

The 1990s

Honma perfects the addition of titanium to carbon graphite shafts, and is granted a US Patent for the technology. The company opens a Head Office in Tokyo, although the giant Sakata 'studio' factory remains its sole production facility and spiritual home. By the mid-90s, Honma's shaft and club manufacturing facilities at Sakata are working at maximum capacity, and the company opens sales offices in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan & Thailand. In the late 90s, Honma builds and opens its first Honma-branded golf courses, Honma Aso Takamori and Honma Public Wakayama. By 2005, Honma – uniquely in Japan – operates over 80 Honma-branded golf stores in the country.

Elsewhere during the 90s, Honma's famously butter-soft blades become the ultimate irons of choice of many Tour players, top amateurs and experienced golf writers, although the company continues to prefer to spend its money on R&D rather than player endorsement fees. Honma remains at the cutting edge of technology, introducing titanium and carbon-composite materials into its range of drivers and fairway woods at an early stage. But production of its gorgeous persimmon head clubs continues, albeit in smaller quantities: as late as 1994, European Tour player David Carter wins the Tour School playing a Honma persimmon driver with a graphite insert.

Honma Story: Summary

- Ancient family, once Japan's wealthiest landowners
- 1958: Honma brothers open a driving range in Yokohama
- 1962: Hiro Honma hand-crafts his first golf club, a persimmon wood
- 60s / 70s: develops belief in golf clubs as works of art, plus focus on technology
- 1976: Honma brand appears
- 80s / 90s: winning worldwide acclaim for ultimate quality
- End of 20th century: known as world's most prestigious golf brand
- 2005: full Honma range available in UK for first time in modern era
- Sakata: Japan's largest golf club manufacturing facility
- Only golf company to have its own chain of retail stores in Japan (80 stores)

The 21st Century

Honma has long been a prominent brand in Japanese golf, but remains virtually unknown in the UK and Europe. In the USA there is a greater recognition factor, and Honma golf equipment is recognised as a money-is-no-object purchase for those who can afford to buy the best. High net worth individuals who love golf are especially attracted to the brand.

There is a Hollywood-style glamour to the Honma range in the States. Jack Nicholson allegedly used a Honma 2-iron to smash a Mercedes windscreen in a 1994 LA road rage incident, and is a fan of the brand, as is Goodfellas star Joe Pesci. Jennifer Lopez, a keen beginner, has a set of Honmas as does her new husband Marc Anthony, the world's best-selling salsa artist. The singer paid \$22,000 for his Honmas in a Hawaii pro shop. *"I went into the shop and told them, 'Gimme the most expensive clubs you got'. It was a testosterone-fest."*

The brand is growing again on Tour. In 2003, Honma staff player Lian-Wei Zhang became the first Chinese golfer to win on the European Tour, pipping Ernie Els to the Caltex Singapore Open title. And in 2004, Korea's Mi-Hyun Kim finished 7th on the US LPGA Tour, winning almost US \$1 million. Kim plays Honma Twin Marks irons. Also in 2004, celebrated English golfer Trish Johnson enjoyed her best-ever year on the Ladies European Tour, finishing 2nd in the Order Of Merit. Johnson will play Honma's gold-plated MG-818 irons in 2005. Her irons retail at just under £4,000 per set: proof that while Honmas may be pricey, they are also serious players' clubs that play like a dream.

The Mole Comes To The UK

By the early 90s, Honma appeared alongside Maruman, Mizuno, Yonex, Daiwa and Tanaka as one of many Japanese brands attempting to make it in the British golf market. For various reasons many fell away, Honma among them, although to this day more experienced lovers of the game in Britain remember the Honma range for its ultra high quality standards, its equally high prices, and most of all for the beauty and soft-feeling performance of its golf clubs.

In 2005, after a ten-year absence, Honma's 'Mole In The Hole' is due to appear in UK pro shops once again. The new UK distributors Honma (UK) have made a full range of the very latest Honma equipment, including drivers, fairway woods, irons, wedges, putters and balls, plus a large range of bags, shoes, waterproofs and other accessories, available to discerning UK golfers. Prices begin at around £1,250 for a set of Honma irons, up to custom-built 5Star 24 Karat gold-plated platinum iron sets which retail at over £20,000.

Highlights of the 2005 range include the classic-looking, high-performance TA-925 Tour Athlete blades, the brand new Twin Marks 808RF Carbonium 410cc driver, the new Tour World FT fairway woods (favoured by many on the Asian Tour) and the easy-to-hit TM-202 cavity back irons.

Golfers are custom-fit for their own Honma equipment. Their new golf clubs are then hand-built to their personal specification and shipped as finished product from Japan. The process, from order to delivery to the individual UK customer, takes 3-4 weeks. Elsewhere we tell the story of why the engraving of 'MADE IN JAPAN SAKATA' is crucial to Honma.

Golfers and potential stockists should call Honma (UK), 020 8942 9924. The full range is available for the UK golf media to test.

Media contact: **Andy Hiseman, Hiseman Ltd (www.hiseman.com)**
 T: 01780 755618 / 07734 936126. E: andy@hiseman.com

Honma UK, 38 High Street, New Malden, Surrey KT3 4HE
www.honmagolf.co.uk (opens March 2005)