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Honma Golf: A Golf Club Is A Work Of Art

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Like Formula 1, golf is a highly technical sport. The world's prestige golf club manufacturers, wedded to a quest for precision, performance and new technology, have long produced equipment that makes the sport one of the world's most expensive to play.

But there's one golf brand that, worldwide, represents the ultimate in both technology *and* price.

That brand is Honma. Making a full-scale comeback to the UK in 2005, a full set of Honma's most expensive irons – the gold-plated Twin Marks MG-818 – costs £4,500. Throw in the giant 460cc £1,000 MG-460RF titanium driver, a couple of £500 fairway woods and the £770 Hiro Honma LB-201 Carbon putter, plus a £350 Honma Tour golf bag, and it's possible to spend over £7,500 on a single set of Honma.

And if that sounds a little small-time, you can order a set of 24 Karat gold-plated, platinum-finished '5Star' irons from Japan. You'll need a spare £20,000.

But why is this?

Why do Honma golf clubs cost so much?

For almost 30 years, Honma golf equipment has won acclaim for its beauty, build quality, performance and feel. But the brand is equally well-known for a different reason: the price.

In Japan the brand has always been premium-priced. Despite the high price point, it sells in large volumes in the Japanese domestic market to golfers who desire the prestige of owning a set of Honmas almost as much as the legendary performance. For many golfers in the Far East, the word 'Honma' automatically triggers the same concepts and emotions – high performance, hand-built craftsmanship, something to aspire to - as words like Aston Martin and Savile Row do for the British.

But elsewhere in the world, in major markets such as the USA and the UK, prices for Honma clubs are not just high - they're double the price of the next-most-expensive clubs on the market.

Here's why.

Made in Japan Sakata

The single biggest factor in Honma's high price is the company's insistence on hand-making every single club in Japan. On every Honma golf club, you'll see the inscription 'MADE IN JAPAN SAKATA'. This is a source of great pride to Honma golf club craftsmen, from the newest apprentice to the most experienced club-maker. Unlike other manufacturers, Honma does not ship components – clubheads, shafts and grips – to its overseas markets. The company only ships fully-finished product, and makes golf clubs nowhere other than in its giant Sakata factory.

This has a large effect on shipping costs and import taxes, which in turn greatly affects Honma's retail price in the PGA pro shop.

Craftsmanship

Today, Honma refers to its enormous 500,000 sq metre plant in Sakata as its 'studio'. The word 'factory', it says, does not do justice to the fact that every single Honma iron, for example, is taken through a 156-step process by a highly-trained craftsman. No corners are cut, no work is hurried. And Honma's passion for ever-improving quality extends beyond the clubhead. Honma has always designed and manufactured its own golf club shafts: the advancements the company has made in shaft technology are at least the equal of those it has made in clubhead production.

The signature Honma 'Mole In The Hole' cloisonné is only stamped on the iron at the end of the most stringent club-making process in world golf today.

So when you pick up a Honma golf club, you know that you are holding something that a skilled Japanese club-maker has worked on for many hours.

The Star system

Honma's Star system, initiated in 1991, denotes both the grade of materials used, and the seniority of the craftsman who builds the club. Hence, a 5Star top-of-the-line Honma shaft uses T-1000 grade composite, the highest grade commercially available, and is produced only by a senior craftsman. And Honma's flagship 5Star irons – for example, the new MG-818 5Star irons, available by specific order only from Honma UK's head office – are cast from platinum and plated with 24 Karat gold only by the company's most senior '5Star' craftsmen.

But every Star club-maker at Honma, experienced or apprentice, receives the most rigorous training available in the golf industry.

Golf Clubs as Works Of Art

Honma's Chairman, Hiro Honma, made the first Honma golf club – a persimmon wood – with his own hands in 1962. Honma these days still makes hundreds of persimmon-headed wooden clubs each month to cater for the growing demand for 'Park Golf' in Japan. Honma's persimmon drivers sound unique, feel unique and look unique – they are still the truest embodiment of Honma's passion for the art of making beautiful golf clubs.

Honma Pricing: Summary

- All Honma golf equipment shipped as finished goods from Japan
- Honma golf equipment only made in giant Sakata 'studio' factory – Japan's largest golf facility
- Culture of hand-made craftsmanship developed over 40 years
- Craftsmen and clubs both given Star rating
- Belief that 'Golf Clubs Are A Work Of Art'
- No-compromise attitude to quality, precision, aesthetics
- All irons cast, not forged, to produce maximum consistency
- All clubs custom-fitted and hand-made to order in Japan

The fusion of art and technology in persimmon-based club-making is still found in Honma's modern steel, titanium and platinum clubs. Honma demand that their craftsmen can shape clubs that are aesthetically pleasing as well as high-performance from any material.

Materials and finishing

Honma uses the highest grade materials available. For many of its irons it uses Japanese S25C steel, an extremely 'soft' grade, different to the variety used by other golf club manufacturers. Honma also makes proprietary changes to the raw materials it uses: these are a closely-guarded company secret. The softer the steel, the more sensation you retain in your hands when you strike the ball – crucial for distance judgement. The soft-feeling S25C is the ideal grade of steel for customisation, too. Each club is designed to transmit maximum 'feel' to the golfer's hands.

Honma's iron clubheads are all cast, not forged. Their belief is that Honma-cast irons feel and play better than other companies' best forged irons. Honma's casting methods, honed over 40 years' clubmaking, produce clubheads of the highest possible quality and consistency when aligned with soft steel materials. Grooves are then carefully carved and sharply defined. The irons are then gently immersed in large vats of nickel, chrome and copper respectively, a 3-stage coating process that produces the classic deep satin effect characteristic of a finely-made Honma golf club.

Finally, the clubs are polished and beautifully finished like a fine Japanese sword. Had they been born 300 years earlier, Honma's craftsmen would most likely have been making weapons of an altogether more deadly nature.

Customised golf clubs

Every UK purchaser of Honma golf clubs buys their own personal custom-fitted set. Once you have tested the equipment, your dimensions, swing details and preferences are logged along with your order, and your personalised golf clubs are hand-made for you by craftsmen at Honma's studio in Sakata, Japan.

Your order is then air-freighted to your door. When you unwrap each individual club, consider the care that has been taken over each one. The grooves, the shafts, the grips, the deeply polished finish – all are a result of Honma's devotion to producing the highest-quality hand-made, technically advanced golf equipment.

SUMMARY

Honmas are the most carefully-crafted custom-fit sets of golf clubs in the world. They are for golfers who value fine craftsmanship, as well as high performance.

Every Honma product embodies the company's mission to place quality above all else. But Honma do not believe that expensive materials alone guarantee performance. Rather, they take ordinary materials, sometimes creating new hybrids of their own, and transform them into something extraordinary using techniques honed over 40 years' club-making.

Honma's refusal to compromise on quality is what the company stands for, and has won the brand high acclaim in both Japan and abroad. Its philosophy and ongoing commitment to the founding principle that 'A Golf Club Is A Work Of Art' reflects their conviction that golf is played with the heart, and that a functional golf club can also be a thing of beauty.

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