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Bill Spigner's Bowling Clinic

■ I've been hearing a lot about the new "reactive" urethane balls. Can you tell me something about them?

At the beginning of the 1992 PBA winter tour, PBA president Marc McDowell won the AC Delco with an X-Calibur, which at the time was available primarily in the Los Angeles area. McDowell mowed down his opponents during the TV finals; that in itself was not unusual, but the reaction of his ball certainly was. Marc's ball had a very long slide with an extremely sharp hook at the back end, something very different from how his normal ball rolled and reacted. The other players on TV looked like they were bowling on a different condition because they could not get their balls to do what Marc's ball was able to do.

Later on the winter tour, Pete McCordic also made a TV appearance, in Peoria, using the X-Calibur. Like McDowell's, McCordic's ball reacted extremely hard on the back end, another uncharacteristic response. With the two TV appearances the X-Calibur was making a name for itself; everyone wanted to know what made this ball hook so hard on the back end.

The reactive or tackified balls are made of urethane, but they have a shiny finish and a tacky feeling on the surface, with an approximate hardness of about 78. This new type of urethane material is the biggest change in bowling balls since the soft two-piece urethane design became the most popular type of high performance ball.

After the X-Calibur, Brunswick introduced a reactive shelled ball, the purple Rhino Pro, a two-piece ball with a core similar to that of the Hammer. The Rhino Pro has a little more passive reaction on the back end than the X-Calibur because of its interior construction.

The X-Calibur is a three-piece ball, but it has a heavy center-weighted core very similar to that of a two-piece ball with a pancake weight block located near the center surface, like standard three-piecers. This type of construction is basically a cross between the two- and three-piece ball. The pancake-shaped weight block gives the X-Calibur its big flip on the back end.

The Turbo-X is Ebonite's entry into the reactive ball market. This ball has the same core design as the Nitro and Turbo, but with one small twist: The top of the core is shaped differently and has an attachment to it, which makes it a more reactive core.

Thus, the Turbo-X is a hybrid two-piece ball. The Turbo core already was a little more reactive than the Hammer or Rhino Pro core because the stem at the top of the core is a little bigger than the stem on the Rhino Pro and Hammer, which makes the Turbo go a little longer and flip a little later. Now, with the additional piece at the top of the standard Turbo core, the Turbo-X will go longer and flip harder than the Rhino Pro. In addition, the ball track of the Turbo-X will flare more than that of a standard two-piece ball.

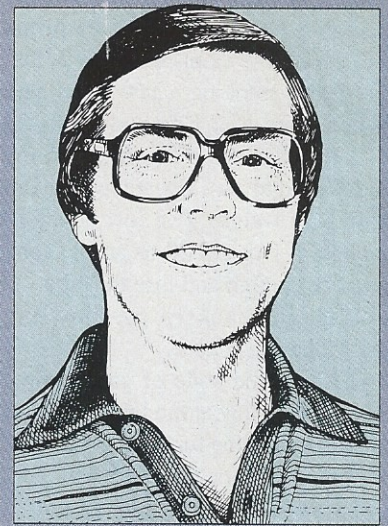
Columbia has two entries in the reactive ball market: the Pro Hook, a two-piece ball, and the Pro Hook Extreme, a three-piece ball. The two-piece Pro Hook has a passive core that makes the ball roll evenly, with a hard arc. The three-piece Columbia Pro Hook Extreme is modeled after the Black-U-Dot; its three-piece design helps the ball go long and have a very strong reaction on the back end. The Pro Hook Extreme has the same type of roll as the Black-U-Dot, but with a longer skid and stronger back-end reaction.

Track has the T-Shark to complement its top-of-the-line heavy-oil ball, the Shark. The T-Shark' a two-piece ball with an oversize core, rolls very evenly.

All of these reactive balls will perform best when you can get the ball through the heads and have strong back ends. Most of them should cause only moderate oil carry down and will react best on gutter-to-gutter oiling patterns. On wet/dry blocks, which make most ball overreact, these reactive balls can accentuate the overreaction. They also aren't good on heavy oil or on extremely dry conditions. I feel these reactive balls are best on average lane conditions.

Considering that most of the reactive balls are very close in hardness, they need to be rated according to back-end reaction and type of roll arc. All of the balls slide long in oil and grab the lane hard when they hit dry boards. The balls that react the hardest, because of their three-piece or hybrid two-piece construction, are the Turbo-X, the X-Calibur, and the Pro Hook Extreme. These three balls slide long and have a sharp break or flip when they make the turn to the pocket.

The next group is the Columbia Pro Hook, the T-Shark, and the Rhino Pro Purple, which hook four to five boards less than the first three balls. The balls in this second group are of standard two-piece



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construction, and they'll give you a rolling pattern similar to that of a two-piece ball—but again, because of the reactive urethane, you'll get the extra skid in oil and more hook on dry back ends.

There is one drawback to these reactive balls: They track up quickly and mar easily. Fortunately, these balls are very easy to resurface and repair.

Trying to decide which ball to get could be a little tricky. My recommendation for selecting one would be to pick one out that has a similar core to that of your favorite ball. Have the ball drilled with your favorite balance and pin placement. Or, if you are looking for a different reaction, discuss it with your ball driller. Most of these balls are driller-friendly; all the same principles used in drilling balls can be applied to the trackified balls.

The balls I mentioned in this column were the only ones available to me at press time. There are more reactive balls on the market, some I don't know about and some I did not have the opportunity to test. As with any equipment, your ball must fit your needs to be of any value to you. Other reactive balls are coming out, so check with your pro shop operators to see what they have and what might be best for you. ●

Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers and will answer as many as possible in this column. Mail your questions to: Bill Spigner, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201.