

Racket juggling

Which racket could you be playing with next? Doug Revolta looks at what the major squash racket companies are offering and reviews five of them

The start of the new squash season brings with it a host of new racket launches and racket expert Gary Spindler, of JustRackets.com, believes it is clear which company has had the biggest shake-up in their offering – Prince.

“Prince have made the most changes of any racket company by making their head sizes smaller across the range,” he said.

“They’ve gone for more control and touch in their products, and now each racket has its own separate coloured strings.

“But Prince’s rackets are quite expensive, so whether they grab the market or not is difficult to say.”

While Prince have made the biggest changes, Paul Hargrave, from PDH Sports, explains how Tecnifibre are also growing in popularity.

“Tecnifibre did a lot of sponsorship deals with juniors and that has increased their popularity because lots of kids were using their rackets,” he said. “They are now one of the biggest brands in squash.”

Common changes this season across all the brands include more teardrop shapes and a cautious approach to the design of light rackets.

“Racket companies have previously focused on making very light rackets, but they’ve found they get more breakages, so that trend has lessened,” explained Spindler.

Hargrave added: “Dunlop recognise that more people are using the teardrop shape, so they are trying to grab a bit of the market with their new Revelation 135.”

Here, Hargrave breaks down what squash’s big hitters are selling:

PRINCE

Prince have made lots of cosmetic changes for this season and have renamed all their rackets, but they have similarities to their previous models.

The racket which is most different is the Pro Beast 750, as it has a more open stringing pattern.

The EX03s are their top-of-the-range rackets and are a little bit more control-orientated.

TECNIFIBRE

Tecnifibre have split their range into Suprem, Carboflex and Dynergy.

There are three different rackets with slightly different head sizes in the lightweight Suprem range, which is for players who want ultimate precision.

The most popular range is the Carboflex, while their Dynergy products are aimed at those who want more power.

The big pull for Tecnifibre is the string that comes with the racket. To have top quality strings already in the racket provides added value.

WILSON

The Hyper Hammer is still Wilson’s best-selling racket. It’s very affordable and they utilise the head-heavy balance, which is becoming less common.

Mid-range, they have released the Ripper, which is similar to Dunlop’s Biomimetic Evolution 130, and they have got Peter Barker’s Tour racket, which has had a cosmetic update.

HEAD

Graphene technology, innovated from their tennis rackets, is Head’s big idea this season. It is claimed to be their new ‘wonder material’. This is designed to take weight from the centre of the racket without weakening it, allowing improved weight distribution.

The focus is on head-heavy and head-light rackets in different weights, and they too have a power teardrop range. For those who want control, their classic head shapes are still available.

Their flagship model, which Laura Massaro and Karim Darwish, use is the Xenon. It has a slightly smaller head and is a great racket for the experienced player wanting total control.

DUNLOP

Dunlop have their popular classic models – the Ultimate, the Elite and the Pro GTX.

The Ultimate has the same head size as the Elite, but a denser stringing pattern gives more control. The Elite offers more power and the Pro GTX is all about control, as it has a smaller head.

They have further streamlined their new rackets and the shafts are thinner, increasing performance levels from previous incarnations.

They also use biofibre technology, which reduces unwanted vibrations in the racket, and this is very noticeable.

Which racket is for you?

THE RACKETS

Tecnifibre Carboflex

Weight: 125g
RRP: £139.99

The Carboflex 125, Tecnifibre's top-of-the-range model, is a versatile and light racket which offers plenty of power despite its weight. It is teardrop-shaped with a thin shaft that still feels sturdy and nicely balanced.

Because of its lightness, the rapid head speed takes some getting used to, but when utilised properly, it delivers well for those who play at a fast pace on the volley and it is equally adept for touch shots.

Having Tecnifibre 305+ 1.20mm strings as standard provides added value to this great all-round racket.

What do the pros think? "I like to play at a fast pace and volley a lot, and I need a fast racket for that kind of rhythm. The Carboflex 125 is light-headed and powerful, which makes it perfect for my game," said world no. 3 Mohamed Elshorbagy

Prince EX03 Pro Rebel 950

Weight: 135g
RRP: £199.95

The EX03 Pro Rebel 950 is billed as Prince's most powerful racket in their latest range. It is the racket of choice for long-reigning women's world no.1 Nicol David.

The head-heavy balance gives a strong feel to the racket and it has a large sweet spot thanks to the Power Ring stringing pattern.

The big sweet spot assists driving from all positions and this, combined with the racket's power, makes it a great racket for hitting length.

The distinctive yellow, black and white colour

scheme with gold strings gives the racket a fresh look, but the shape still retains that instantly recognisable Prince look.

Harrow Stealth Ultralite

Weight: 125g unstrung
RRP: £160

The Stealth is head-light, has good touch and feel, and is well built for attacking play. It allows quick head speed and the sweet spot gives great power and response. The rectangular grip, typical of Harrow rackets, sits nicely in the hand.

This racket comes with high-quality Ashaway Supernick XL Micro Strings to give added value and performance. It is best suited to accomplished squash players who can utilise the control it offers.

What do the pros think? "The racket headshape is similar to the Spark, which I was using before. It's the same weight, but it's now head-light. People are obsessed with weight, but for me it's about how it's distributed and the Stealth does it perfectly," said world no.24 Adrian Grant.

Dunlop Biomimetic

Weight: 130g
RRP: £139.99

The Biomimetic 130 Evolution has great touch and feel thanks to it being slightly head-light. This also makes it easier to generate increased head speed, which is well suited to those who like to dominate the middle of the court.

At 130g it is easy to lift and intercept shots with, but it is not just suited to a mid-court game. It is a versatile racket

with a slim teardrop shape that moves well through the air and offers a nice touch at the front of the court.

It has a very nice balance and despite it being head-light, it still offers plenty of power. But the focus here is definitely on the great control you can get from this racket.

What do the pros think? "The reason I use this racket is because it's head-light, it really suits my game of volleying with lots of head swing and it really helps to utilise the strengths in my game," said world champion Nick Matthew.

Black Knight Ion Element PSX Selby

Weight: 140g
RRP: £159.99

Black Knight have just released Daryl Selby's signature version of the Ion Element PSX.

It is five grams heavier than its predecessor and shares the same weight and balance as the Magnum Corona 6, sporting a traditionally shaped wide head to give control.

It is a real livewire that generates power through its thick shaft, rigid frame and Ashaway Ultra Nick 18 strings. But the thin mesh grip and head-light balance ensures the frame does not weigh it down.

The lavish design is a striking and unique finish to this fun racket that offers power and touch.

What do the pros think? "I love my new racket. It took several prototypes before we found the right balance and weight for my game. I can really feel the ball when playing touch shots to the front of the court. It's perfectly balanced for me and is a great racket for the all-court player," said world no.10 Daryl Selby.



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