

HOME & DESIGN

Inside: Guide To Luxury Home Builders LATE SUMMER 2003

HomeTech

Virtual Toys

The latest crop of simulators lets you bring your favorite sports indoors—for a price

By Stephanie Cavanaugh

Daryl and Christina Brockman loved the golf simulator they tested at a golf show last winter. There they were, dressed for a blizzard, listening to the virtual chatter of birds in spring.

"We tried it out and it was so accurate and lifelike, we were amazed," Daryl recalls. "I hit a seven iron outside, 155 yards, a high shot with a slight fade to the right. On the simulation machine there was a shot on a par three that was 154 yards with the same slight fade to the right...Same swing, same everything. I did it three times. I couldn't believe it."

The Brockmans were sold. Now they're installing a golf simulator in the 10,000-plus-square-foot house they're building on the edge of a golf course in Great Falls, Virginia. And though the snow may pile to the eaves next February, in their basement it will always be Palm Beach, or Palm Springs or Monterey.

The simulator, from **Dead Solid Golf**, allows up to four golfers to play 18 holes at any of 27 world-class courses, including Pebble Beach and Rancho La Quinta, says Matt Novak, the company's sales and marketing director. They can also use it as a driving range for solo practice.

Though the course may be virtual, the action is actual. The selected course is projected on a giant high-impact, nylon-mesh screen, but you're teeing up and hitting a real golf ball. Under the floor lies the nerve center of the system, the swing analyzer. "It's a sophisticated piece of equipment that will allow you to not only play a golf course but allow you to see everything about your swing," says



A simulator from Dead Solid Golf lets indoor golfers play 27 world-class courses.

Novak. You can see your swing path, the impact point and the ball's trajectory, measure its velocity and even videotape your moves and replay them.

While 75 percent of the company's business is commercial, Novak says, "Residential sales are skyrocketing. We have put no less than 50 units into homes in the last two years." This may not sound like a lot, until you consider that the units range in price from \$28,000 to \$44,000, depending on the model and the options.

You can't just plonk one in the house either. Brockman's architect, Mark Sullenberger of Custom Design Concepts, carved out a course 22 feet long, 16 feet wide and 12 feet high. "I had to have my foundation dug two feet deeper for this," Brockman says. But he figures it will be worth it. "When it's 12 degrees outside, my regular golf buddies can come over and play."

That is the beauty of a simulator, Novak agrees. "You can practice your game any time of day and in any weather. A person in DC can play golf 12 months of the year. You don't even have to leave the house."

For details, phone (800) 889-3727 or visit www.deadsolidgolf.com.

Basement Ballpark

Still have what it takes to hit one out of the ballpark? Still wish you did? **ProBatter Sports'** batting simulator is used by the New York Mets, the Cleveland Indians and other major league teams to keep their batters sizzling. Trot Nixon of the Boston Red Sox even has one at home.

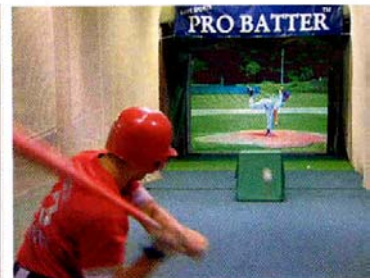
ProBatter general manager Kevin Mahoney says the computerized pitching module has "nine levels, from little league to major league, and seven strike pitches: fastball, curve, slider, splitter, cutter, change-up and sinker." Any pitch a pitcher can throw—right or left-handed, full wind-up or stretch.

The pitcher's image is projected on a video screen. "The hitter sees the pitcher look to the catcher for a signal, wind up and pitch," Mahoney explains. The second the ball leaves the glove, an actual baseball is released.

"It's not something for the average baseball fan," he cautions. "But for the well-heeled fan, with the room..."

The simulator, invented by the serendipitously named Adam Battersby, rounds the bases at a tidy \$75,000 and requires "a full batting cage tunnel" that's

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ProBatter Sports' batting simulator.

70 feet long by 14 wide by 12 feet high. "It's as close to live pitching as you can find in the industry," Mahoney promises.

For details, phone (203) 874-2500 or visit www.probatter.com.

Zoom Zoom Zoom

Oh, what a plaything for the car buff! Actual retired NASCAR racecars that—through a little high-tech magic—let you experience all the jaw-gritting excitement of careening around the track like John Andretti. And not. You can safely watch CNN while you're steering.

Kramer International, which provides wild toys for thousands of events each year, has a fleet that has been driven on some of the wickedest tracks by the likes of Rusty Wallace and Casey Mears. A flat panel monitor mounted on the car's dashboard gives you a choice of actual courses. Speakers capture the roar of the engine while a "virtual hydraulic" system replicates the gut-wrenching motion.

"You feel the same vibration as if you had a motor," says Robert Fisher, Kramer International's director of marketing. "The same goes for crashes. When you're done your arms are tired, they feel like you've been fighting the power of the car."

Not one of the cars, used for promotions at tracks and other venues, has been sold to a private individual—yet. For more information, phone (888) 655-7263 or visit the Web site www.kramerintl.com. ♦

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