

2014 GOOD GEAR GUIDE

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

LORD'S
THE HOME OF CRICKET

THE 37 BEST BATS TESTED
FROM THE SHOP TO THE CREASE,
THE PICK OF THIS YEAR'S RANGE

THE DON'S TOP 10 BATS
A FIRST-CLASS VIEW FROM OUR SECRET PROFESSIONAL

HEAD TO TOE
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO GET KITTED OUT FOR THE SEASON



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Welcome

**2014 GOOD
GEAR GUIDE**

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FROM THE EDITOR

It's time to take stock ahead of a new season. Stock from the Lord's Cricket Store, that is.

IT'S BECOMING our annual January joy, *The Cricketer's* pilgrimage-come-pillage at the finest cricket shop in the land. When it comes to beating the winter blues there's nothing like a trip to the Lord's nets, especially when armed with an arsenal of brand-new weaponry.

This year's Good Gear Guide features 37 of the finest bats imaginable. We have heavy bats and light bats, flashy bats and demure bats, pricey bats and bargain bats. Whatever your standard, and no matter how deep or shallow your pockets may be, we guarantee that the blade

for you is somewhere in these pages. Because, believe me, we saw off more than 2,500 deliveries on your behalf to make our findings as forensic as possible.

Each member of our six-man testing panel, with its 50-50 pro-am split and diverse range of styles, has nominated his willow of choice and on page 122 our secret first-class pro, The Don, gives his own verdict on the 10 bats that tickled our collective fancies the most. But the only way to be sure that a particular bat is for you is to test it out for yourself. Turn to page 132 to book

your own 'Try before you buy' session at the MCC Cricket Academy and look out for the discounted prices available throughout this supplement.

As ever, we owe special thanks to the Lord's Cricket Store and the MCC Cricket Academy (Duncan Coplestone and Steve Naylor in particular) for allowing us to take such liberties with their wares. Don't forget, it's not all about the bats either. Seven of these pages are dedicated to the replenishment of the rest of your kitbag. The 2014 season promises to be one of new beginnings. And we know the perfect place to start.

THE TESTERS

ALEX PIGG
Competition winner

STUART PIGG
Competition winner

MARK ALLEYNE
MCC Head Coach

AFF NASEEM
Lord's Cricket Store

JIM HINDSON
The Cricketer magazine

ANDREW MILLER
The Cricketer magazine

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NEWMAN TOON


For all of the equipment featured in this year's Good Gear Guide and much more, visit shop.lords.org



Brief encounter

Andrew Miller falls in love in the Lord's Cricket Store as *The Cricketer's* bat testing operation goes into overdrive once again

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL CARROLL,
PORTRAIT COLLECTIVE

Her grains ran smooth and straight, drawing my eye from the toe to the splice and back again. Her curves were subtle yet powerful, caressed into shape by a disciplined but gentle regime of lathe, chisel and sandpaper. She commanded instant attention as she stood there in the Lord's Cricket Store, her willowy yet strong features embellished by the classiest hint of stickering.

It was lust at first sight as I tentatively beckoned her down from her plinth and swept her into my stance. "I'm out of your league," she whispered, as together we sashayed down an imaginary wicket and galumphed a heavy-footed drive towards the soft goods section. And on any ordinary day this would indeed have been true. Her price tag was prohibitive, her balance and poise wasted on a Sunday league slogger such as me. But this was no ordinary day, and no ordinary place either.

"Shall we go for a test drive?" I asked, motioning towards the pristine lanes of nets awaiting next door in the MCC Cricket Academy. "Sure," she replied coyly. "Why not?"

Humbug. That sort of fairytale never comes true, does it? I might as well keep dreaming that the England selectors are about to call (though, admittedly, my chances have never felt higher than they do in the Ashes aftermath).

And yet, for one day a year, in the otherwise bleak month of January, fantasy really is made flesh at the Home of Cricket. As one of six lucky testers for *The Cricketer's* Good Gear Guide, it is once again my arduous task to speed-date through the finest bats in the 2014 range. And transmit my findings to you, the willow-wielding public.

It's an awesome responsibility but there's a crack team helping to make it happen. Back for another year of testing is *The Cricketer's* own Jim Hindson, a former Notts and England Under-19 spinner, as well as the MCC Cricket Academy Head Coach, Mark Alleyne, of Gloucestershire and England fame. Making his debut is Aff Naseem of the Lord's Cricket Store, who used to turn out for Pakistan Under-19s before turning his hand to coaching. And our two competition winners, Alex and Stuart Pigg from Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, whose day includes an impromptu >



Dancing in the aisles:
Andrew lines up
another imaginary
drive as Stuart, Alex
and Jim talk shop


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Cricket writing: Andrew has his notes taken by Dan (top); Mark gives his opinion (above left) as does Aff (above right); another throwdown on its way (below)

spell of tuition from Alleyne before a Hawk-Eye session in the Academy's own performance analysis suite.

Behind the scenes there's the usual hive of activity – bats to be paraded on the catwalk and catalogued ahead of their outing in the nets, interviews to be conducted by Dan Norcross from *Test Match Sofa*, marks and comments to be collated by Dan, Benj and Dave from the magazine editorial team. And nothing would be possible without the tireless efforts of MCC's arsenal of Young Cricketers, who between them must have served up some 2,500 throwdowns for our delectation.

After three solid hours of tonking and talking, I am spent. I've used up as many analogies as calories in translating my deeds into words,

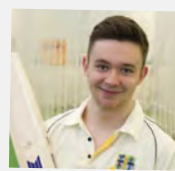
yet through the fog of exhaustion a consensus is starting to appear about the day's winners and losers. There's no doubt in my mind about the day's outstanding blade (see page 117) but it's not an opinion which is universally shared. That just goes to show, the only real way to find out if a bat is the right one for you is to try it out for yourself. Turn to page 132 to find out how to do just that on your next visit to Lord's.

Back in the real world, I know my brief encounter will never work out. We are quite simply incompatible. My kitbag smells of all things fetid and my pads alone would surely be a deal-breaker, stained as they are with sweat and dust and threadbare at



Lord's 'How To Buy' Guide Check out the Buyers' Guide videos from the Lord's Cricket Store

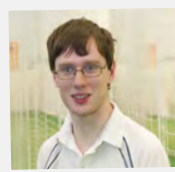
THREE HOURS OF TALKING AND TONKING HAS BURNED AS MANY ANALOGIES AS CALORIES



ALEX PIGG
Competition winner

A bowling allrounder for Cheshunt CC, Alex, 18, is the club's reigning Young Player of

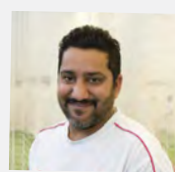
the Year but used to think cricket was a "boring old man's game" until his brother bullied him into playing in the back garden – a rare concession as Alex is generally the competitive one. Now he's hooked: "I'll watch the Ashes, Big Bash, IPL, whatever cricket is on."



STUART PIGG
Competition winner

More of a watcher than a player, Stuart's main aim as a batsman is to "stay in and let the guy at

the other end do the work". His finest hour was a two-wicket burst in his first game – "one of which was Alex". An Essex supporter, he makes a pilgrimage to Chelmsford at least once or twice a season, most recently to watch England's warm-up before the 2013 Ashes.



AFF NASEEM
Lord's Cricket Store

Supervisor at the Lord's Cricket Store, Aff was a wicketkeeper/batsman for Pakistan Under-

19s and Surrey Academy before turning his hand to coaching. His finest hour came in an innings of 174 for Surrey Academy against Kent Academy. His most memorable bat was a Kookaburra Bubble. "Working at Lord's is the dream job for me," he says.



On the job: Mark Alleyne gives some impromptu coaching to Alex Pigg (above); Alex and Stuart give their marks to Benj (below) and have their bowling analysed by Hawk-Eye (bottom)



the knees from a decade of near-miss run-outs. They'd be no sort of companion for such a classy new arrival but I could no sooner trade them in than shoot the family spaniel.

But my God, for those 17 deliveries, we were in perfect harmony.

It should, by the strictest rules of the day's engagement, have been no more than a dozen throwdowns per bat. But with this one I just couldn't let go. Every shot found a middle from whatever fragment of wood it was permitted, and a cursory inspection of the blade afterwards showed not a trace of a seam mark, so I guess we'll never know who was fooling whom. But for as long as it lasted, our dalliance was blissful escapism. A fantasy made flesh on a winter's day at Lord's.

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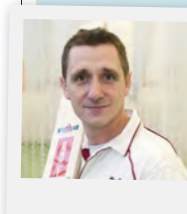
MARK ALLEYNE MCC Head Coach

A Gloucestershire legend who played 10 ODIs for England, Mark has served as MCC's Head Coach since 2009. In the wake of England's Ashes disaster, his role in nurturing a new generation of talent has never seemed more vital. "I am genuinely optimistic about the future of English cricket," he says. "It's important for any new player coming through that he earns the right to be selected."



ANDREW MILLER The Cricketer

A short but sharp season for the editor culminated in a career-best 7 for 18 for Test Match Sofa against the Lord's Taverners. But his batting remains as hit and miss as ever. "I'm a confidence slogger," he says. "I tend to rely on a dropped catch in my first six balls, then there's no stopping me." He is currently nursing a hurt shoulder, courtesy of his Darren Gough follow-through.



JIM HINDSON The Cricketer

In his days as a county pro Jim was briefly sponsored by Gunn & Moore but tended to be served up cast-offs that Mark Ramprakash wouldn't be seen dead holding. However, the quality of the bats in the 2014 range impressed him greatly. "They are getting lighter and lighter but the balls just keep flying off," he says. "No matter what level you are, anyone can find the boundary."



ONLINE EXTRAS
Listen to Dan Norcross' interviews from the day at Lord's at www.thecricketer.com

GOOD GEAR GUIDE

BATS



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TESTING PROCEDURE

Our Testing Day began with a Supermarket Sweep and was rounded off with an intensive three-hour net session. Our six reviewers worked their way through the shelves of the Lord's Cricket Store, gathering together all the bats that caught their eye until a final tally of 37 had been selected. Then they split into pairs (Mark and Jim, Andrew and Aff, Alex and Stuart) to receive approximately half a dozen throwdowns per bat from our team of MCC Young Cricketers. In a subtle departure from last year's Testing Day, the price of each bat was revealed before it was tried out to ensure that the genuine bargains were given as much of a chance to stand out as the day's big beasts. While one partner took his turn in the net, the other would give his verdict on the bat just tested to our editorial team, marking each bat out of 10 on six criteria which were then number-crunched to create the order of merit you'll be reading all about on the following pages.

READER OFFER

Lord's Cricket Store is offering up to 25% OFF all the products featured in the 2014 Good Gear Guide – with discounted prices shown in **WHITE**. Recommended Retail Prices are shown in **YELLOW**



Gray-Nicolls Nemesis Four Star RRP: £175 LORD'S OFFER: £131

Hot pink stickers and a lumpy "angry-looking" blade. It was impossible to miss this one on the shelf, which was an obvious plus, but its appeal was subsequently lost on the panel. Jim struggled with his timing and felt vibrations. Not the best in show.

5.44/10



Adidas Master Blaster Pro £300 / £225

Sachin Tendulkar has lent his name (and logo) to this offering but he'll probably keep it up his sleeve for a tapeball match on the Mumbai maidans. Light and thin yet lacking Sachin's deftness of touch. It looks good in the hand but you expect that at the price.

5.58/10



Kookaburra Kahuna 400 £130 / £97

Incredible price but there's little hidden value to be found. Attractive stickers "make an ordinary piece of wood look good", according to Mark, but there's no disguising its lack of sophistication. Still, you could pay more elsewhere and get less for your money.

6.33/10



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Adidas Pellara Club
RRP: £190 LORD'S OFFER £142

No shrinking violet, like the man who endorses it. The day-glo stickers won't go unnoticed on the shelf, and you'll never go off in bad light. "It made me want to bat like KP, not in a good way," says Andrew. Jim was nonplussed by a bat that placed style over substance.

6.46
/10

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Adidas Pellara Elite XT
£450 / £337

Price or performance? On this occasion quality wins by a nose. But is the Elite worth the extra £260? Not really. The wood is superior but the sell is in the stickers, which are identical to the Club's. Great for die-hard KP lovers but others may want to look elsewhere.

6.67
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Gray-Nicolls Powerspot
£200 / £150

Gray-Nicolls have mined a rich seam of nostalgia in recent seasons by resurrecting icons such as the Scoop and the Dynadrive. Sadly, this year's retro reboot consists of a badly positioned piece of shiny blue tinfoil. Yet Jim was "pleasantly surprised" in the end.

6.75
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Chase R7 Volante
£196 / £147

"The Ford Mondeo of cricket bats" was Jim's verdict. Uninspiring but reliable. Stuart liked the silver stickers and Mark declared it "slick" but the consensus veered towards the dull. "It played to its price but it didn't fill me with confidence," says Andrew.

6.83
/10

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Gray-Nicolls Oblivion e41LE – £400 / £300

Alex had already tested the less pricy five-star version and likened the LE to an iPhone upgrade. “Everything’s just a bit sharper.” Jim was less impressed – “the GN spark is just not there.” Andrew was mesmerised by the blade’s resemblance to the Batmobile.

6.83
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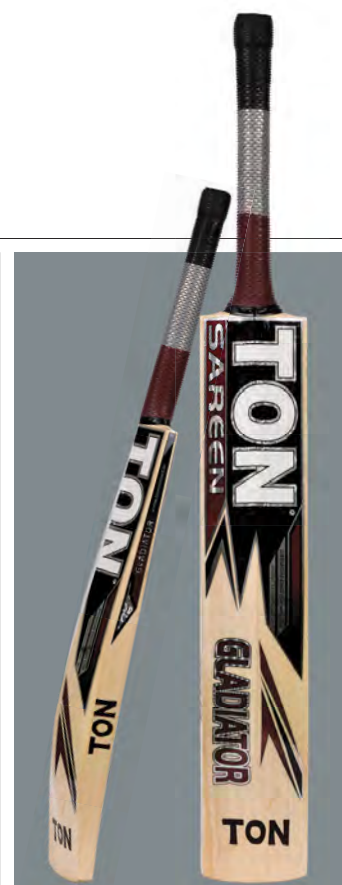


Chase R11 FLC £375 / £281

A “feminine” bat, in Alex’s opinion; “a bit mechanical and square-looking,” says Jim. Presumably they can’t both be right, but the fashion jury was clearly still out. Stuart liked the “neat and simple” finish, Andrew was a little put off by some “smutty” grains.

6.88
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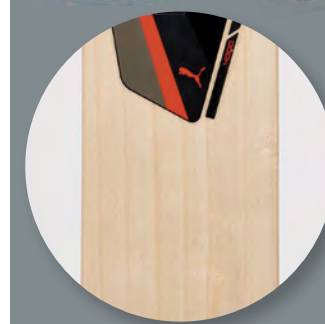


Ton Gladiator Elite £500 / £375

“A nice bit of tree,” says Mark, but at £500 a pop, you’d bloody well hope so. Alas the Gladiator looks like every other Ton in the forest. Andrew was turned off by its shouty branding and “cotton bud” handle. Alex was a fan but “on a hot day the weight would test you”.

6.92
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Puma Platinum 4000 £280 / £210

Jim went off like the clappers – “A great blade for chasing a total” – but others had to play themselves in. “The sweet spot is too concentrated,” says Mark, “but you’re not being robbed at the price.” Aff reckoned the shiny stickers might help put off the keeper.

6.92
/10

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Chase R4 Lancer
RRP: £148 LORD'S OFFER: £111

Chase often appear to be chasing their market. Should they rival the big brands or carve themselves a smaller niche? This year's stickers suggest a move towards the latter and the Lancer was a worthy fit. "Memorable outing, incredible price," says Jim.

7.13 /10



Ton Power Blaster Classic
£150 / £112

A springy middle but it's the stickers that really leap out. They are everywhere. "Ton" on the front, "Ton" on the back, "Ton" on the toe. Even their website gets a mention. It'll be "How am I driving?" next. Pretty well, as it happens. "A genuinely explosive sweet spot," says Jim.

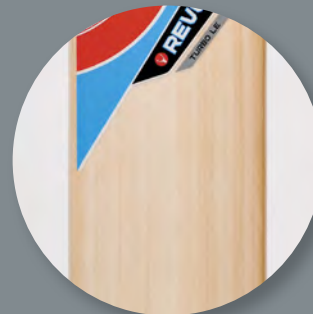
7.13 /10



Hunts Revolution Turbo LE
£310 / £232

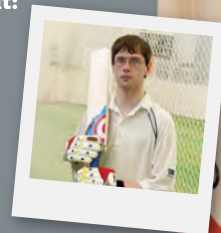
Hunts may not have been actively courting the retro market but, by and large, their throwback design met with the panel's approval. "A clean blade with no frills, and characteristic of County bats of years gone by," says Jim. Aff reckoned the stickers were a bit "cheap" but his was a lone voice of dissent. Alex thought they were "eye-catching" while Mark went so far as to describe them as "psychedelic", which can only have been a compliment given his love of Gayle's Spartan bat. "Clean, light, and did the work for me," says Andrew.

7.19 /10



My favourite bat:

Stuart Pigg
"My preference is for a light bat so this was just the ticket for me. I wasn't convinced when I first saw it but I was really impressed with its performance. Very comfortable for playing my shots."



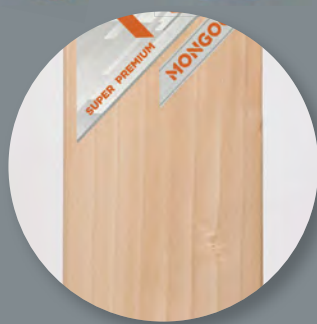


Gunn & Moore Icon F7 Original – £375 / £280

A bat for “openers, not sloggers” says Jim, which may explain why Andrew was bothered by a lack of meat. Mark’s eye was drawn by the classic GM look and “beautiful finish”, though Aff found the wood hard and the design basic: “A bit of colour would have been nice.”

7.19
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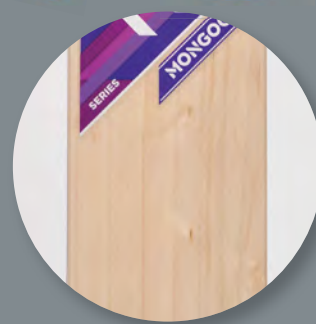


Mongoose ReBEL Super Premium – £365 / £273

Like the straight-laced daughter in *Ab Fab*, the Mongoose family rebel is actually the normal one. No wonder our testers were divided. “Plasticky and fake,” says Alex but Mark applauded its efforts to fit in. A decent bat but it could be anyone’s. Which is presumably the point.

7.25
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Mongoose ToRQ Series £195 / £146

Understated by Mongoose standards but the stickers still looked like spilt Ribena. The bigger mess, however, could be to the bowler’s figures. Andrew was seduced by the pendulum swing of a bottom-heavy blade. Jim loved its “fun factor” and big hitting area.

7.27
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Gray-Nicolls Powerbow Gen X Players – £300 / £225

“A bat of two halves,” says Mark. The face is understated but the rear is a riot of green lightning which Andrew found offputting. Looks aside, Jim was concerned about the (lack of) weight but soon changed his tune. “It had turbo power, even when late on the shot.”

7.29
/10

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GOOD GEAR GUIDE

BATS



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Gunn & Moore Octane F2 606

RRP: £130 LORD'S OFFER: £97

If you're looking for a bat to get someone started in the game, then look no further. The look is traditional and the shape a touch reserved but the Octane's price is almost as jaw-dropping as England's defeat in last month's Brisbane ODI. There's simply nothing like it when it comes to value for money. The grains are a bit of a mishmash, implying it's a cast-off from a choicer cut of willow, but waste not want not is clearly GM's motto. "No vibrations which is great for the price," says Aff. "It's a front-foot playing bat, so good for English conditions."

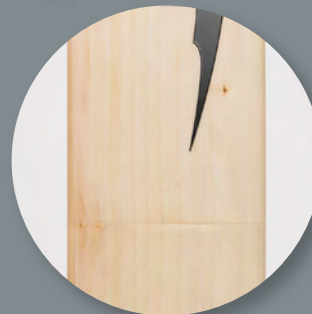
7.98/10



- FIRST IMPRESSIONS:
- BUILD QUALITY:
- PICK-UP/FEEL:
- PERFORMANCE:
- VALUE FOR MONEY:
- STAR RATING:



Lord's 'How To Buy' Guide
Check out the Buyers' Guide videos



Salix SLX

Salix place craftsmanship over commerce. This bat is all about the beauty of its build, and it's a touch daunting as a result – not just in terms of price. "It comes with the expectation that you'll drive like Cowdrey and cut like Bradman," says Jim. "Clearly not for me!"

8.08/10

- FIRST IMPRESSIONS:
- BUILD QUALITY:
- PICK-UP/FEEL:
- PERFORMANCE:
- VALUE FOR MONEY:
- STAR RATING:



Newbery GT 5 Star

Not many batmakers can dress up their wares in ecclesiastical purple. For Newbery, however, holy orders feel appropriate. "The company has such a reputation for quality, you assume you'll be paying £400 each time," says Andrew. A genuine bargain.

8.08/10

- FIRST IMPRESSIONS:
- BUILD QUALITY:
- PICK-UP/FEEL:
- PERFORMANCE:
- VALUE FOR MONEY:
- STAR RATING:

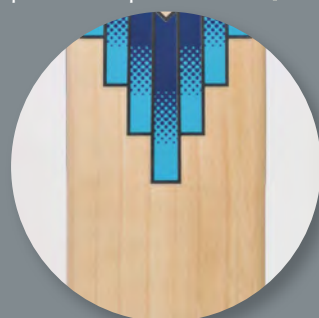
Millichamp & Hall CK22
£475 / £356

A radical, successful departure for such a traditional brand. The stickers were the biggest sticking point – Mark reckoned the brand had been taken over by Barclays, Stuart thought he was playing Tetris – but the meatiest Millichamp in the market packed a phenomenal punch. “A belter, but I wouldn’t have picked it,” says Andrew.



My favourite bat: Aff Naseem “They’ve gone out of their comfort zone with a quality piece of kit, jam-packed with power.”

8.21/10



- FIRST IMPRESSIONS:
- BUILD QUALITY:
- PICK-UP/FEEL:
- PERFORMANCE:
- VALUE FOR MONEY:
- STAR RATING:

My favourite bat: Jim Hindson

“I like the stickers, they give a modern feel to an old-fashioned brand. The rounded edges might split opinion but the performance is so fantastic it doesn’t matter. It’s a lot of money but well worth the investment.”



Newbery Kudos SPS
£500 / £375

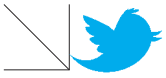
“Kudos” indeed. Who comes up with these names? It’s as if the marketing team has upped sticks to Hoxton. Jim feared the feminine green was a touch too pretty for the batsman’s good and Alex felt its styling let it down. Even so, this bat was so well-balanced it could have ridden into the net on a unicycle and not wobbled once. “It oozes class, and its performance matches its looks,” says Mark. The exquisite grains had enough pizzazz to reward even Andrew’s tired heaves at the end of a long stint. “It looks smart and plays smart,” says Stuart.

8.29/10



- FIRST IMPRESSIONS:
- BUILD QUALITY:
- PICK-UP/FEEL:
- PERFORMANCE:
- VALUE FOR MONEY:
- STAR RATING:





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Kookaburra Impulse 950

RRP: £360 LORD'S OFFER: £270



Far from being an impulse purchase, the Kookaburra Impulse claims *The Cricketer's* Gold Award for 2014 thanks to its relentless excellence in every category. First things first: you won't miss it on the shop floor. "A measured amount of neon is rarely a bad thing on a bat," says Andrew. Next comes the price: £360 is the higher end of mid-range so there are two distinct markets in play. The pick-up is sympathetically balanced and the build doesn't miss a beat, with a sweet grade of willow and a solid oval handle to lend confidence to all strokes. In Jim's opinion, its performance was "exhilarating". Light enough to encourage finesse but sturdy enough to lend some wallop when needed, this really is a bat for all occasions.

8.29
8/10

- FIRST IMPRESSIONS:
- BUILD QUALITY:
- PICK-UP/FEEL:
- PERFORMANCE:
- VALUE FOR MONEY:
- STARRATING:



"I'm a fan of the bright colours. The orange goes with my trainers!"

"Very slick, and well worth the upgrade from a £200 blade. The higher grade of willow makes all the difference"

"The Aussie confidence is unmistakable. You'd be hard-pressed to walk past this in the shop"



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The Don

Our secret first-class cricketer took to the nets to test our top 10 bats straight from the shelves. He gives his professional verdict and ranks them in his own order.



The Don's top-10 thoughts

My top four were all exceptional – the feel of bat on ball was just so much sweeter than the rest. I like my bat to look good as well so I wish Newbery and Salix had some funkier stickers. But performance is what you are after. The middle three – the Millichamp & Hall, the Newbery GT and the Gunn & Moore – were all decent. I wouldn't be upset if I had one in my bag.

10 Kookaburra Ricochet 550

There's not that much to say about the bat's performance. It's OK, but nothing special. Nice, sturdy handles, though. I'm not a big fan of toe guards myself and the bat feels very long for some reason. I'm not really a fan of scooping out the back of the bat to create a little ridge. It takes a lot of wood out of the bat. I tend to like a traditional shape.



9 Gray-Nicolls Legend

It's got a nice bow to the shape, it feels pretty nice in your hands and picks up well. But there's that slightly concave indent on the face of the bat and for me these kind of bats just don't perform as well. It was a bit tinny and didn't sound anything like my favourite bats on the list and I wouldn't necessarily pay top dollar for this. My overall verdict? All right.



8 Puma Chromium 3000

In terms of style it looks great. There seems to be a real trend at the moment for huge edges. Personally I don't like that and this sounded a little tinny. However, it's as light as a feather. When bats get this big and light, it makes me feel as if I've got to smack it every ball. I won't be playing with a lot of finesse with a blade like this. A middle-order bat.



7 Gunn & Moore Octane F2 606

I don't like the shape at all. You've got all the weight down at the bottom, which is fine if you are Kevin Pietersen and you're hitting the ball out of the sweet spot every time. When you connect like that it absolutely pings. But if the ball hits a bit further up it sounds very tinny – in fact it jars your hands. I've been a big fan of Gunn & Moore but this one doesn't do it for me.



6 Newbery GT 5 Star

I like Newbery. They are a traditional company who like to keep it simple. But for me, the looks can be a little dull. At least this one's got a bit of colour in it. The handle is very, very thin and doesn't leave you with much confidence that it's going to last that long. The middle is high so this should suit more of a No.5/allrounder batsman. A good one-day bat.



Weight issues

A few years ago a lot of bats were great big things that weighed 3lb. But all these bats are all 2lb 8oz or 2lb 9oz, a standard weight. You don't need heavy bats to get a lot of wood in them these days because they're not pressed as much. It's also shown, perhaps, that using a heavy bat for one-dayers and a lighter bat for four-dayers is a bit of a myth.


5 Millichamp & Hall CK22

It's a smart-looking bat and I like the colours and style. Millichamp & Hall have always been quite reserved with their stickers but they've gone for something a bit different here and I like it. They produced one of the best bats I had as a youngster and they always make good products. I quite like the shape of this one and the performance is decent. All in all a good, solid bat.



4 Spartan MP 3000

Spartan are new to the English market but they've already got Michael Clarke and Matt Prior on board. I think the stickers look messy, too higgledy-piggledy. But there's a lovely feel and weight to the bat, a really nice pick-up. It sits behind the toe really comfortably and feels nice in the hands. A good piece of wood. It's got wide edges but they haven't scooped all the meat out of it. Really sweet.




3 Kookaburra Impulse 950

The design hasn't changed much over the years but they've brought in some funky colours and I like it. The bat itself has a nice balance. It's nice and light. There's not much of a bow, though – it's very straight. When you tuck your bat in behind your toe in your stance, if the face of the bat is very 'straight' sometimes it doesn't feel very comfortable. It suits a classy, classical player like Ian Bell.



2 Salix SLX

Absolutely gorgeous. The traditionalist will like the plain look although I can't quite get my head round the shape. The way they've scooped out the back seems strange to me. But there's a great shape to it and it's got a lovely feel. It's very comfortable in the backlift, with a great weight to it and strokemakers will like it. Top class. I just wish they would work on the visuals so that people would take it off the shelves!



1 Newbery Kudos SPS

The look is great if you like the simple look and you can't argue with its performance. It's got a lovely feel to it. There's a nice bow so that it sits nicely in your stance. These are massively popular on the county circuit and renowned for being top quality. This is a stroke-player's bat and, at about 2lb 8oz, a top-order batter would really enjoy using it. Absolutely gorgeous and just shades the Salix.



GOOD GEAR GUIDE

PADS & GLOVES



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OVERVIEW



For this year's range of soft goods and footwear, there's been more emphasis on understated glamour rather than out-and-out pick-me bling. Batting pads in particular have been pared back in terms of looks in favour of easily recognisable quality and value for money. The surprises were to be found in New Balance's excellent first foray into cricket footwear and in Chase's exceptional wicketkeeping gloves. Another notable innovation is Ton's offering of a top-notch bat, gloves and pads for around £200. In price terms, this appears to be something of a benchmark when kitting out the average weekend warrior.



Lord's 'How To Buy' Guide Check out the Buyers' Guide videos from the Lord's Cricket Store

The Don on ... pads and gloves

Your gloves have got to be comfortable and allow you to really feel the handle. I will generally go for a slightly smaller-sized glove so there's not too much rucking-up of the leather in the fingers, which means you can lose your connection to the handle. Your gloves need to be sturdy as well – you get hit on the fingers a lot. Pads are all about comfort. It's a very personal thing: style, comfort, cost. In terms of protection, I would spend a little more on my gloves than I would on my pads.



THE CRICKETER
GOLD AWARD



Gunn & Moore 808 Pads RRP: £55 LORD'S OFFER £44
Gunn & Moore 808 Gloves RRP: £35 LORD'S OFFER £28

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £67

Traditional, confidently understated, simply exceptional. The build quality and materials are peerless and tick all boxes. The pads have a slightly clipped appearance above the knee-roll, which makes them look a touch squatter than normal, but no less appealing. You can buy them with absolute confidence.

The gloves have a mid-range price and a heavy-duty feel, which is never a bad thing. They stand out for their incredibly well-engineered look and feel. Top class.



Newbery Test Batting Pads – £55 / £44
Newbery Test Batting Gloves – £45 / £36

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £75

Every year Newbery deliver an excellent and compelling range of pads and gloves that perfectly complement the understated livery of their bats. The pads have a classic cane and wadding construction with traditional looks, all underpinned by a modern lightweight feel.

The gloves are equally attractive to traditionalists. Newbery have no need to reinvent the wheel because their quality always shines through. If you like their style, you will never be disappointed.



Ton Power Blaster Classic Batting Pads – £35 / £28
Ton Max Power Classic Batting Gloves – £30 / £24

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £49

The pads are average-to-good at a good-to-excellent price. Incredible value, if slightly dated, they have a flat-faced look rather than the traditional cane and bolster aesthetic. Not the ideal protection when facing Mitchell Johnson but certainly good enough to feel confident on a Saturday afternoon.

The gloves have a similar look to the recent Puma range, offering comprehensive protection at a price to trust. A solid build, and undeniably the best of the hi-tech options.



Gray-Nicolls Legend LE Batting Pads – £125 / £100
Gray-Nicolls Oblivion e41 Test Gloves – £60 / £48

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £139

Gray-Nicolls' range looks best when worn as a set, but be prepared to pay extra for your co-ordinated outfit. The pads are spongy to the touch and present themselves as a hybrid somewhere between those worn by Sachin Tendulkar and a traditional set of leg-guards. The look is fantastic but the price is steep.

The gloves have the usual understated values associated with the most traditional of cricket's traditional brands. They are good without being market-leading.

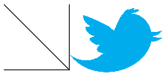


Kookaburra Bubble Star Batting Pads – £50 / £40
Kookaburra Bubble Star Batting Gloves – £40 / £32

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £67

The pads are neat and come with the usual pin-tucked knee-roll and rippled cane innards that you always associate with the Kookaburra brand. The high-gloss (almost plastic) aesthetic is likely to polarise batsmen across the country.

The gloves are a mid-tempo offering at an attractive price. Kookaburra's Bubble range – bat, gloves and pads – look good together as a set and the blue and red livery really stands out on the shelf for 2014.



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THE CRICKETER GOLD AWARD



Spartan MP 1000 Gloves RRP: £105 LORD'S OFFER £84
Spartan MP 1000 Pads RRP: £80 LORD'S OFFER £64

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £139

The gloves are endorsed by Matt Prior and come with a metallic blue finish to the back. The colour makes for a modern, eye-catching look but they don't demand to be tried on.

The pads are rather low-rent and come across as all logo and no substance when first seen on the shelf. Disappointing and uninspiring for a leading brand. It feels like a case of missed opportunity for Spartan.



Chase R11 Wicketkeeping Gloves – £50 / £40
Chase R11 Wicketkeeping Pads – £40 / £32

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £67

Top drawer. First-rate construction and finish, marrying ultra-soft leather backs with a well-finished cuff and palm. An exceptional pair of gloves from a brand with no history in this category. Superb all-round value.

The pads are incredibly well-made at an excellent price, offering loads of protection and value. To buy them as a set costs £67 which is an absolute bargain.



Kookaburra 1000 Wicketkeeping Gloves – £100 / £80
Kookaburra 750 Wicketkeeping Pads – £30 / £24

BUY BOTH, SAVE MORE: ONLY £98

Every year Kookaburra produce consistently eye-catching equipment throughout their range, from bats to gloves to pads. This year's keeping gloves have a conventional look but they come at an eye-watering price. For the Kookaburra aficionado only. The rest of us will leave them sitting in the old gum tree ...

The keeping pads aren't game-changing, but neither are they ground-losing.

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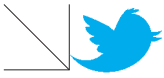




*Valid until 31st March and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.

GOOD GEAR GUIDE

HELMETS



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The Don on ... helmets

I'd be willing to spend a bit of extra cash if a helmet offered extra protection. It'll cost you far more than £150 to replace your teeth so a good lid is worth it. One major rule: if you get hit and there is a bit of damage, then you must replace it even though it's expensive. It won't perform in the same way if you get hit again.



2014 GOOD
GEAR GUIDE

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Masuri X-Line RRP: £220 LORD'S OFFER £160

Traditional looks with extra protection, including a shock-absorbing peak and an eye-line grille to deflect balls away from the face.



Adidas Premiartek – £85/£68

An Ayrtek-designed batting helmet in the style of a saucepan lid. Great protection at this price but the jury is out on its looks.



Adidas RawTek – £250/£180

The unvarnished version in the range but it is made from exceptional materials. Ultra-rigid construction at top of the evolutionary tree.



Masuri Test – £85/£63

Definitive. Pleasing on the eye, better on the head. Light to wear but still reassuringly tried and tested. Once you go Masuri, you tend to stay Masuri.



Albion Ultimate 98 Titanium – £175/£130

If Masuri is the default England helmet then Albion forms the basic Australian shell. A look and feel that have stood the test of time.



Albion Ultimate Classic – £85/£68

A reduced version of the Ultimate 98 in terms of materials used, this is a serviceable piece of kit at a price that doesn't scare the horses.



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Lord's 'How To Buy' Guide

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This offer is subject to the availability of net space and the terms of use of the MCC Cricket Academy.

SPECIAL THANKS

Huge thanks to the following MCC Young Cricketers – plus our valiant testers and competition winners – for making this year's equipment bonanza our best ever. You have been watching: (Back row, left to right) Mark Alleyne, Matthew Maule, Simon Stevens, Adam Dobb, Jim Hindson, (Front row, left to right) Zain Shahzad, Aff Naseem, Andrew Miller, Alex Pigg and Stuart Pigg. Whether you hit, missed, threw or spoke – thanks for your much-valued contribution.



The Cricketer teamed up with Lord's to bring readers the very best junior equipment the game's manufacturers have to offer. To view this indispensable one-stop guide, simply visit the link below or alternatively, scan the QR code.

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