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THE
SCENES

PHOTOS EVE CONROY

PowaKaddy: Back on track

Craig Dennett visits PK HQ as the brand continues its resurgence

When it comes to electric trolleys, no brand has been around longer than PowaKaddy.

Founded in 1983 by original owner Joe Cafford, it has been a mainstay of the industry since that day, but it's a journey that has had plenty of ups and downs for the Kent-based brand.

Just three short years ago, the company was in the hands of the administrators. That's when, in August 2012, Joe's son David Cafford and business partner John deGraft Johnson stepped in and took charge of PowaKaddy once again.

David had been the company's first employee back in 1983, while deGraft-Johnson had been involved with PowaKaddy all the way up until 2004, when he sold his stake. For both men, the emotional pull of the company played a major role in their decision to return, but the chance to turn the brand around and build it back up to the successful heights it had reached in the past also proved a contributing factor.

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First things first, they had to sort out the problems in the company. There were a lot of underlying issues when the duo took over, and for deGraft-Johnson, the reasons behind PowaKaddy's problems were clear.

"The business had gotten over bloated," he explained. "It was trying to be all things to all men. It had a huge range of products; push carts, pull carts and trolleys. We were using 17 different battery specs, we had three different suppliers making three versions of the same wheels, it was all too much and too big."

The solution was to 'squeeze down the volume' as deGraft-Johnson puts it. "It was really a huge culture shock to the business in terms of the product range and product volume," he continued. "At that point we said we'd really shrink the business down, and then got to the beginning of 2013 and relaunched ourselves with a new product. We haven't looked back since."

That 2013 release saw a return to the Freeway trolley design, PowaKaddy's flagship and most successful electric trolley to date. It was a move that proved

✿ NEW GEAR

► to be a major step in the right direction where both the company and consumers were concerned. Powakaddy turned a profit in the next year of operations, and is continuing to grow year-on-year.

Now, the brand is looking forward, and it's doing so in a market that now views electric trolleys as something of a trendy product, with Powakaddy's deal to supply England's elite amateurs with trolleys helping the 'cool' factor amongst young golfers. Unsurprisingly, this change in mindset has been welcomed with open arms by all of the electric trolley manufacturers.

"In the 90s, trolleys were distressed purchases," admits deGraft-Johnson. "They were walking zimmer frames essentially. In the 2000s, they became aspirational products, game improvement products. Now, they are fashionable products, people like them and can see the benefits they offer. They're not just seen as being for old people anymore."

One of the big changes made at Powakaddy since deGraft-Johnson and Cafford took over has been to the trolley design, with both keen to make the products more simple. They understand there are people out there who want trolleys with 'all the bells and whistles' they can get their hands on, but they also understand that most golfers just want a trolley that is reliable and can get their clubs around all 18-holes without any issues.

At the moment, half of the brand's sales are of its entry-level product, the FW3, while the other half is made up of the rest of the range. Its rate of growth in 2015 is impressive, too, up at 50% through April. A normal rate of growth, according to deGraft-Johnson, is around 4%, not 50. They expect that to settle down over the coming months, but everyone at the brand is delighted with how its products are being received. "Golfers love the product," beamed deGraft-Johnson.

Going forward, there is plenty to consider, and there's still a load of innovation that can be included in the electric trolley design. The introduction of an integrated GPS device



■ Every Powakaddy trolley is assembled by hand at its factory in Sittingbourne, Kent. Each model is built using the same basic chassis.



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is high on the list of priorities for golfers according to Powakaddy's recent market research, but the brand is focused on keeping everything simple, because simple works for both Powakaddy and golfers.

"When we arrived back in the company in 2012, there were some really clever ideas being deployed on the products, but at times it was too confusing for the average

consumer to understand what was really going on with the trolley," continued deGraft-Johnson.

"There's an awful amount of complexity involved in making things simple. I don't think people realise how hard 'simple' is. Recent research has shown that people want things like GPS rangefinders on their trolley, and that's the kind of thing we'll potentially look at, but with everything

electronic, it's a case of making it work with the trolley."

We'll get a glimpse of what the future is set to hold for Powakaddy and its electric trolley designs when the brand's new range is launched in the autumn. One thing's for certain, though, Powakaddy is loving its return to being a force in the market once again and it looks to set to continue for a long time.