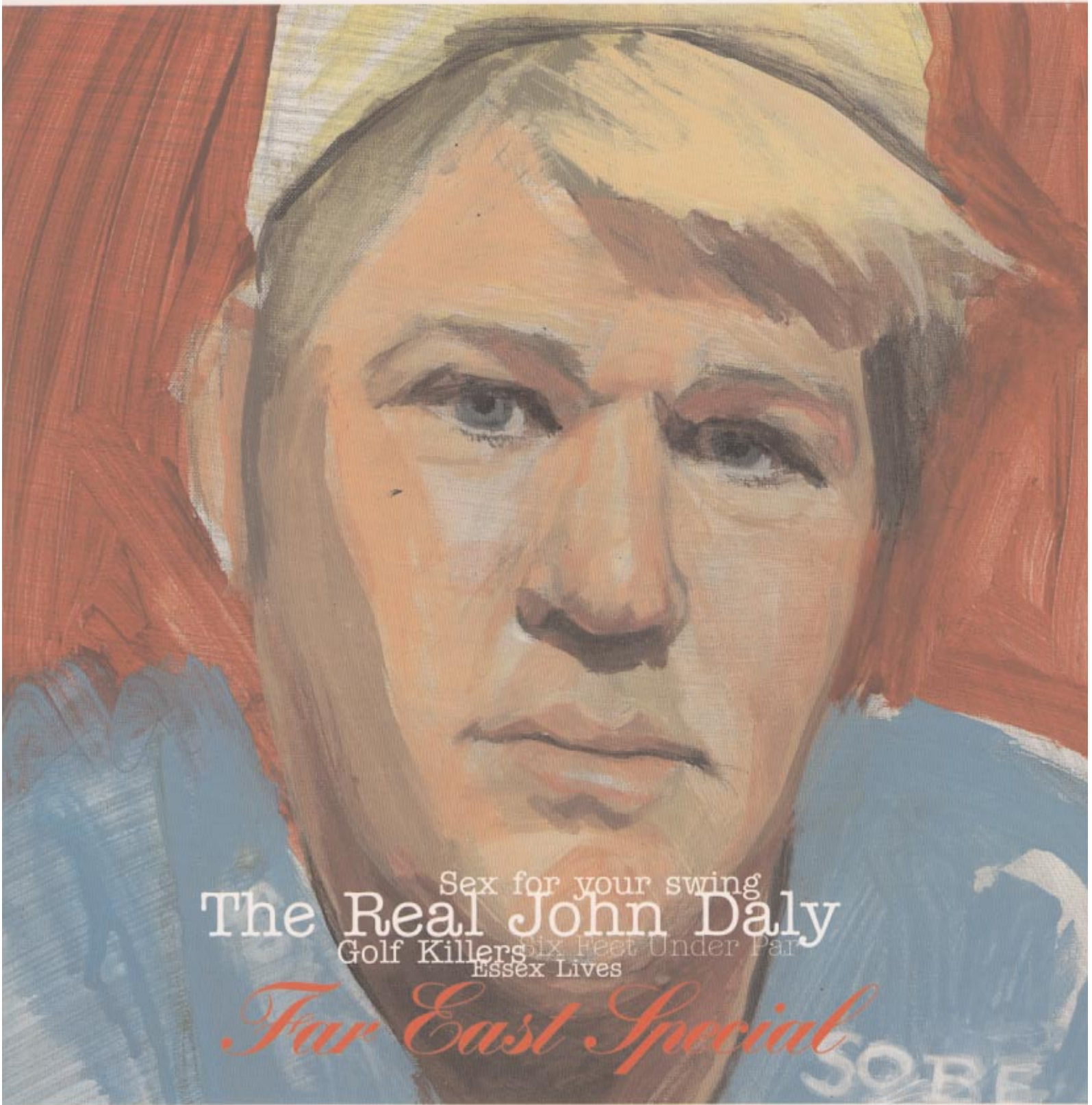


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# ICE ICE BABY

Steve Muncey looks at a club that's well hard

It could have been the ultimate status symbol to flash on the 1st tee - if they'd been a little less functional with the design. But thankfully, the makers of the Diamond Touch DR4E driver resisted the temptation to make their new club golf's equivalent of a garish Cartier diamond wristwatch.

For a club that comes with a £700 price tag and a clubface constructed from diamonds you might expect a little visual drama, but there's almost none. From any sort of distance you'd have had trouble picking it out from any other wood in the bag - although there is a "20 carat" label in big white letters on the head cover for Essex boys who want to be seen pulling it out of the back of their Range Rovers Yogues.

Instead of cut diamonds, the face has a small disc insert constructed from industrial grade diamond powder (apparently, this is equivalent to 20 carat). The diamonds were compressed under heavy pressure (1,000,000lb per square inch) to a thin disc of tungsten carbide, which itself is an incredibly hard alloy. This disc was then worked to produce a mirror-like surface, which the makers claim is the hardest surface adorning any golf club.

The physics behind this seem sound enough. An extremely hard surface transfers the energy of the swing into the ball more efficiently,

producing longer shots. The highly polished surface means less back or side spin is imparted on the ball, leading to straighter shots and also maximising distance because less backspin means more roll when the ball hits the ground.

Diamond is roughly ten times harder than titanium, the material most commonly used in drivers at the moment. However, where this design loses out is in its inflexibility. The latest generation of drivers deliberately have "hot" faces, which flex very slightly upon impact with the ball. This is known as the "trampoline effect" and it has been proven to increase the distance of tee shots. The DR4E (which stands for Diamonds Roll For Ever...how droll) has virtually no flex in its face but the makers claim the extreme hardness of the insert material and its efficiency in transferring energy more than compensates for this.

Personally, I found that while the club produced a nice, piercing trajectory, it didn't produce shots any longer than my own Mizuno titanium driver generated - although the fairways were producing very little roll. However, Britain's national long drive champion, Paul Barrington, apparently sent a drive 359 yards down the 1st fairway at Royal Blackheath in a recent demonstration day.

One drawback is the size of the diamond disc itself. It's quite small and centred on the clubface, which means you lose the claimed benefits if you have an off-centre hit - a common occurrence for us mere golfing mortals when using a driver.

At the end of the day it's a question of how much money you are prepared to spend on possibly adding a few yards to your drives (don't expect to be able to try it first, I can't see your local pro having too many "demos" in stock). Tour pro Ronan Rafferty, who is endorsing the product, said he gained between 10 and 20 yards to his tee shots with the DR4E. Assuming that's true, that you can do the same and taking into account the fact that you can pick up a decent hot-faced driver for £300 these days, purchasing a DR4E means you're paying £20 for every extra yard gained down the fairway - or further into the trees. ☹