

Here some other thoughts from an old Ping collector's group:

In this sequel to ***Buying Classic Ping Irons***, I hope to answer many of the questions which have been sent to me since the original guide came out. Again, the main topic will be the second series of Ping irons: the Eye2, Eye2 +no+, Eye2+, Zing, Zing2 and ISI models sold from the mid 1980's until the turn of the century. I don't sell clubs on eBay. The opinions are my own.

Why buy a complete set?

In the first article, I stated that a buyer should seek a complete, matching serial number set (including the matching S and L wedges) without much explanation and with only oblique references to value. Why? Pings were cast in stainless steel, Beryllium Copper (BeCu) and Beryllium Nickel (BeNi). The casting process is not perfect in that sometimes small voids form within the castings and therefore individual heads will not necessarily have identical weight. When Ping assembles a set, it selects heads with comparable relative weights then assigns a serial number to the set and installs a steel or graphite shaft to achieve a target total weight. Thus, a matching set not only has serial numbers that match, it's also swing-weighted to match. That's the whole point of the geeky, engineering fun of Pings with the lie-angle fitting and proprietary shafts and all: the company has eliminated variables for you. Take advantage, pay a little extra and buy as large a matching set as you can. Plus, when you're ready to sell, the more complete your set is, the higher the price it will fetch.

What's a gap wedge and why do the Zing2 and ISI's have so many different wedges?

First, a history lesson: Until the early 1980's, most pros and amateurs carried two wedges: a sand wedge of approximately 55 degrees loft and a pitching wedge around 50 degrees. Around this time, some pros began replacing one of their long irons with a third wedge, called a lob wedge, around 60 degrees to assist them around the green. Ping was one of the first manufacturers to offer an L-wedge as part of a set in the Eye2 series.

Next, a physics lesson: There are two ways to make a club hit the ball farther: decrease its loft (make it stronger) and increase its shaft length. As seen below, manufacturers including Ping do both. But one club has a limitation: for some reason, for most people, a sand wedge with less than 55 degrees of loft really doesn't work very well out of the sand. This has to do with the interrelationship between the loft of the club, the amount of bounce of the club and the sand itself. Unless you are truly gifted with wedges or play a course with no traps, you need a sand wedge for sand with between 55 and 58 degrees of loft. If you're having trouble in the sand, get a 58 with 11+ degree of bounce; it'll change your game. Finally, a marketing lesson: If you've ever wondered how manufacturers seem to come out with succeeding generations of clubs that hit it farther, the answer is they don't; they cheat. Beginning in the late '80s and continuing to the present day, manufacturers, including Ping, have progressively strengthened the loft on their short- and mid-irons and slightly increased the length of the clubs so that you will hit a new "8-iron" farther than your old one. The fact is, you should because that new 8-iron is almost the same loft and length as your old 7-iron. But, as we noted, if you strengthened a sand wedge, it wouldn't work out of the sand. So as the irons and pitching wedge had their lofts progressively strengthened (reduced), a loft gap of some ten degrees developed between the new pitching wedges and the more or less static sand wedges. This gap has come to be filled by "gap" or "utility" wedges around 52 degrees. And if you wanted something with more loft to use around the greens, a lob wedge remained around 60 degrees. Don't believe me? Here's the loft data from Ping:

	1i	2i	3i	4i	5i	6i	7i	8i	9i	PW	U/S	L/S	L
Eye2 (1985)	16	18.5	21.5	25	28.5	32	36	40	45	50.5	*	57.5	61
Zing2 (1993)	15.5	18	20.5	24	27	30.5	34.5	38.5	42.5	47	52	57	61
I3 (1998)	15.5	18	20.5	24	27	30.5	34.5	38.5	42.5	47	52	56	60
G10 (2008)	*	18.5	21	24	27	30.5	34	38	42	46	50	54	58
G15(2009)	*	*	20	23	26	29	32	36	40	45	50	54	58
I20 (2012)	*	*	21	24	27	30	33	37	41	46	50	54	58

* not offered;

Note that Zing, Zing2 and ISI irons had identical lofts

G15s are .75 of an inch longer (almost two clubs worth) across the board, than Eye2.

And lest you think I'm picking on Ping, I'm not: the statistical information released by Callaway, Titleist and Cleveland (in particular) indicate a similar trend in their clubs as well. In any event, Ping tried to capitalize on the interest in wedges by offering six different wedges in the Zing2 and ISI series to allow the customer to pick the wedges he or she wanted:

W - 47 W2 - 49.5 S - 52 S2 - 54.5 S3 or L/S - 57 L - 61

These wedges were offered in stainless steel (with the S3 marked as L/S) and BeCu in the Zing2 and in the same metals plus BeNi in the ISI models. My thought is that for a four wedge mix, you need W, S, S3 and L as the S3 is the only true, albeit weak, sand wedge of the bunch. Even if you go with three wedges you've got to have a mixture that includes the S3 or use the L out of the sand. They're all good wedges but some thought needs to be given as to which ones to carry.

Holy Grails

Most Ping collectors are interested in the Eye2 model with a complete BeCu 1-L commanding the most attention. One guide lists the Eye2 + no + as the only truly collectable Ping. I disagree. There are other equally rare Pings out there. Two that come to mind are a matching number set of 1-L, BeNi or BeCu ISI (15 clubs, 9 irons and 6 wedges) or all six Zing2 BeCu wedges with matching numbers. I've not seen either of these items for sale on eBay since 2001. eBay itself has brought a new dimension to buying Pings. Used Pings used to be a rare commodity that traded infrequently. You had to know somebody or be standing there when someone brought them into the pro shop or driving range to trade in order to buy used Pings. Now with eBay, at any given time there are several sets of every kind of Ping for sale and at least five or six sets of BeCu clubs for sale during an average week. The net effect is that the prices have gone down. While a Ping set in good condition will probably recover at least what you paid for it, some of the premium is gone. For instance, a 1-L set of BeCu Zings sold new around \$60 per club, which is about what you would pay for a complete set in good condition today. Eye2 BeCu were cheaper and sell higher but only the Eye2 + no + sell at a significant premium (in the area of 100% and only for truly complete sets in good condition). Remember the old economics standby, price

is a function of supply and demand. EBay has exponentially increased supply (through access) from what it was ten years ago and demand has apparently remained steady or relatively constant, therefore the price of the sets has gone down. Some value guides exist that do not take into account the accessibility of clubs on eBay, and therefore have inflated prices. Ignore those guides and watch for yourself how much the clubs you're interested in go for before committing to buy. Remember that 99% of all of the Ping clubs sold on eBay are not collectable, regardless of what the seller indicates. In ten years, the only "collectable" clubs will be complete 1-L or possibly 2-L sets with all matching numbers, regardless of alloy. Everything else should be out on the course being played as these clubs' continued playability is the basis for their present retained value. Think about it, how often do you see a collectable set like old MacGregor Colokroms or Wilson Dyna-Powers from the '60s up on a wall somewhere? In ten years, individual Ping clubs will be in a barrel in the shops of driving ranges. Any new modern wedge has better, sharper square grooves and puts more spin on the ball than the best-preserved Eye2 or Eye2+ lob wedge. If the Eye2 wedges were as good as the breathless representations of some sellers, every tour pro would have had one and they didn't (and they can't anymore under the new groove rules). Ignore the hype - - play the Pings.

Questions about new Pings

I divide Pings into four groups, the original irons, I - VI and original Eyes, as the first group (simple cast clubs with small cavity backs and varying sole weighting), the second group as the Eye2 - ISI models (more complex castings, cavity back with varying perimeter weighting) and the third group as I3, I3+, G2, and I5/G5 (cavity back with a tuning port). Anser, S56, S57, S58 and S59 we'll call Blades. Rapture, Rapture V2, G/I5 -G/I/K15 start a new generation with emphasis on toe-weighting. It's been at least ten years since I saw someone actually playing a first generation Ping iron set, therefore I would say that these clubs are more collectable than playable. A complete set might have value to a collector or historian. I also think it's too early to tell about the staying power of the newer models. I thought an S59 set would hold its value well but they are now selling much less than half price used. I know a number of people who went

from Eye2+ to I3 and back to their Eye2+s. It's important to remember that the reason that the second generation of Pings have held value so well is because of their fine playing qualities. These qualities hold up favorably against any modern equipment including new Pings.

Rank?

Some people asked for a ranking. Ranking these clubs is by nature a very subjective exercise. Before somebody gets bent out of shape on this, the following rank is my opinion of the playability qualities of the Ping irons of the second and third generations annotated accordingly. I've played them, talked to friends about them and this is what I think:

- 1) (tie) Eye2+ no+ / Eye2+ - indistinguishable by hitting alone; workable; great for any level amateur
- 3) Any Blade series - great for a scratch amateur; add Pingwedges and you have the ultimate set; not for beginners
- 4) Zing - for the good amateur who doesn't have time to work on his game; more forgiving than Eye2+; very ugly
- 5) Zing2 - #1 for a beginner; largest, most forgiving club Ping ever made; hardest to work; kinda ugly
- 6) (tie) G5/G10 - best of the third generation clubs for average golfers; solid feel; more up-to-date than Eye2
- 8) I3+ (blade or regular)- Subtle, solid improvement of the I3s; might be the best value of third generation
- 10) (tie) I10/ I5 / I3 - O.K. clubs but try 1 - 9 first
- 13) Eye2 - Good all-around club; wide sole good in soft turf areas; still a solid performer after 20 years; legal under 2008 groove rule
- 14) G2 - G2 chrome detail peels off; HL long irons not as good as true hybrids
- 15) ISI - the worst feeling Pings of all; small sweet spot; early Cushin shaft inserts broke loose; wedges O.K.

I haven't tried the Rapture V2 or G15s yet and I haven't heard anybody ranting or raving about them. All of the Ping wedges are excellent.

1-13 are just as good as anything made today. Workability is the club's responsiveness to shaping shots by a better player.

Forgiveness is the ability of the clubs to hit an acceptably long, straight shot on an off-center hit. Early third generation clubs have a

problem with the urethane inserts in the tuning port falling out. Ping will usually replace these at no cost.

Ping values?

Value is a tricky question; what is the buyer willing to pay and what is the seller willing to take? I bought a set of Eye2 heads 2-9 for \$160 (\$20 per head). I've seen complete 1-L sets of both BeCu Eye2's and stainless Eye2+ no+'s sell for \$1450 (\$120 per club). I bought an ISI BeCu L-wedge, in good shape, for \$35; I saw a well-preserved +no+ L-wedge sell for \$245. Your purchase should be somewhere in this range. With new Pings retailing at \$110 per club, (too high by my way of thinking), you can get a set of used Pings for about a third that are just as good if not better for you and your game. For those who asked what I think their set is worth; the fact is I don't know without seeing the faces, soles, backs and shafts. Have they been bent in loft or lie or reshafted? And if so, who did the work? Ping? All of these factors figure into value. Use \$35 per club as a good figure for Pings in excellent condition and adjust for age, wear, shaft type and metal.

Why do Eye2 Lob wedges cost so much?

The short answer is: for no good reason. Elsewhere in these articles are facts and figures about the Eye2 and Eye2+ wedges. The bottom line is that the most recent Eye2+ wedge is now 15 years old and it is used. It is conceivable that there might be an Eye2 L-wedge somewhere with the stickers and wrappers on it, but everything else is used. Some are more used than others, but none of them have as fresh a groove as any new Ping, Titleist, Callaway or Cleveland wedge. Ping iWedges are functionally identical to Eye2+ wedges and cost \$89. Why spend almost \$200 on a fifteen year-old wedge that does not spin the ball as well. Eye2 wedges are sucker buys.

My serial number wraps around the hosel rather than running parallel to it.

You have a set cast and manufactured in and for the European or Far Eastern markets. Sets like this came back with our service men and business travellers over the years. As far as I know they are identical to the clubs made here 'though they may have been shafted

differently. My friends in Japan all want American clubs and the Americans who know of them are convinced that the foreign clubs are some how better. I do know that Ping here in the USA does not (yet) have a data base of the foreign clubs so you can't call them to verify loft and lie.

Bent Pings

A number of people took me to task for suggesting that a buyer not purchase a Ping with its lie angle bent from some other dot color. I stand by what I wrote previously; buy Pings that are their original dot color. Yes, you can bend Pings of all metals at least a degree or two in both loft and lie. If bent too far or too often they will shatter. And yes, they will return to their original loft or lie eventually. I have watched all three occur. It's your call. But, in the spirit of fair disclosure, Ping will bend, at the factory, most second generation stainless steel clubs up to two degrees and third generation clubs up to four degrees in loft and lie. This difference is due to the stress relieving cut-out in the hosel and possibly different heat treatment on the newer heads.

Square Groove Redux

In August 2008, the USGA changed the groove rules for clubs manufactured after January 1, 2011. The short version is that the grooves will be smaller, farther apart and not as sharp on clubs with more than 26 degrees of loft. ONLY the original Eye2 will be legal under the new rule and that because of the settlement reached with the USGA back in the original lawsuit. The USGA has released no scientific or statistical evidence to justify this rule change. The only people who benefit are club manufacturers and members of old-money country clubs who can no longer host USGA events because present technology has passed the course by. Guess who controls the USGA.

ALL PING GOLF CLUBS ARE CONFORMING UNDER THE USGA RULES OF GOLF THAT EXISTED WHEN THEY WERE MADE.
EYE2s WITHOUT AN EXTRUDED + ARE BANNED FROM R & A TOURNAMENT PLAY.

Original Eye2s and all subsequent (and prior) Ping irons are conforming under the rules and eligible for play in U.S. Golf Association (U.S. & Mexico) events. For Royal & Ancient events

(everywhere else), original Eye2s without an extruded + on them are banned. There are no "non-conforming" Pings under U.S.G.A. rules. All Pings manufactured after 1984 have square grooves. All of these. You have removed the outer layer of tarnish. Not quite brand-new, but better than before.