

ProTee Golf Simulator Review by Par2Pro

Package Tested: ProTee Golf Simulator 2.0 - BASE PACK 2 (screen not tested)

Tested By: Par2Pro Golfer and Instructor (both left and right handed)

Date Tested: Aug 8 to 22, 2011

Review By: Cory Gauvreau

Delivery

Shipping took just over 2 weeks from time of order to my door. The brokerage cost, including: Duty, Customs GST, Bond Fee, etc., was about \$150. Overall it was a good experience with no problems.

Package

Upon opening the box, I unpacked the following:

- Hitting sensor pad with fibre grass top – 12" w x 24" d x 2.75" h (cable length 15')
- Putting sensor pad with hard top – 12" w x 12" d x 1.125" h (cable length 3')
- Impact screen – 14' 1" w x 10' 2" h
- Two light fixtures with 50 watt low voltage bulbs (No transformer)
- Playstation Eye camera (for launch angle)
- 15' Active USB extension (for camera)
- USB to serial adaptor (for hitting sensor to computer connection at computer end)
- Adaptor with international plug options (for hitting sensor pad)
- Software DVD

All of the equipment provided seemed very durable and of high quality. It appears that the products are all setup to last a lifetime for the home user and a longer-than-average lifespan for commercial use.

Setup

While there were no paper instructions or quick start guide, it was pretty obvious that I had to install the software first. However, there was a pdf instruction document on the DVD, so I opened that first. After checking to make sure I had the proper computer specs listed in the first section of the manual, I moved forward with the installation instructions. Unfortunately the instructions are a little backwards and they talk about installing the hardware before the software. I had to install both the USB and the camera drivers to get the hardware to read properly.

TIP Upon first receiving the system, insert the CD, open the pdf manual, and install the software AND drivers. Then proceed with the hardware install.

Setting up the hardware was pretty straight forward, but was delayed due to two installation requirements

1. The lights require a 110V to 12V low voltage transformer
2. The lights must be mounted over each sensor pad

So for the transformer I used a Eurofase 150 W transformer that I had on hand (used for the ForeGolf system). I am glad that I had this available because these can be a bit of a pain to find.

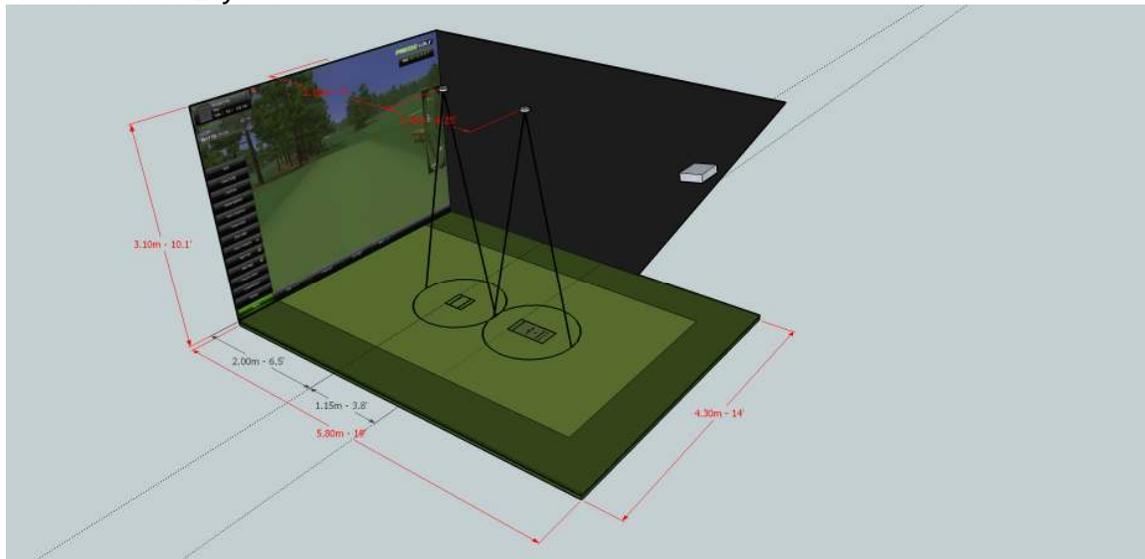
TIP Order or pickup your transformer at the same time you order your system so that it will be available when you do your install.

As for the position of the lights, there were a couple of complications:

- A. I had to stray from the recommended layout due to the room depth restrictions
- B. I had to create a temporary light mount as I was in a room with a vaulted ceiling

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Recommended Layout:



Once I got through wiring the lights and coming up with a new layout, I installed the sensor pads in the floor. Luckily the room I was in had a 2.75" thick subfloor, so I just cutout the floor to fit the sensors. The floor also had a putting turf on top so I was able to cutout the turf to leave openings for the putting sensor (2 rows). Since the putting sensor was thinner, I had to add a foam underlay to level the surface.

I then installed the temporary light setup and plumb bobbed the lights so they were in perfect position with the sensor pads.

Although I used an existing impact screen, I thought it was a little odd that they did not include installation instructions for the screen that they provided with the package. For those who need help with it, feel free to contact me for different setup options.

I was able to plug in the launch angle camera and the sensor pad connection without any problems (unlike the initial attempt ☺).

Now onto the software setup...

First off the manual takes you through the interface configuration - basically the software is divided into two programs: interface and game (portal). Unfortunately, we ran into another delay here as you had to send in the number on the interface in order to 'activate' the system. I emailed the number to the email address provided and got the license key (activation code) first thing the next day (along with the game license key).

TIP It is really important that you have an internet connection for activation & updates - be prepared to wait up to a day before you can activate/use your system.

Once the system was activated I opened up the interface from the tray. There was a com port error in which I simply opened up Windows device manager and got the com port # of the sensor pad and then entered it into the settings of the interface. It would have been nicer if there was an auto discovery like P3ProSwing has, but it wasn't a really big deal. After restarting the interface the com port, hitting sensor and putting sensor were recognized.

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The interface has a huge number of options, including tweaking everything from individual club adjustments to ball drag & lift adjustments. This can make the system even more accurate by tweaking it to your game, but I did not get a chance to play around in here.

I was able to check that the sensors were working by clicking on the 'Show Sensors' button. As you waved your hand over the sensors, there was a check box for each sensor that became checked showing that it was working. All looked good so onto the launch angle camera.



The launch angle camera took a bit to get positioned properly and configured in the interface properly. While the manual states that the camera should be placed 40" ahead and 100" to the side of the tee (ball) position, I did not have the width and just moved it closer. I later confirmed with ProTee that the camera can be positioned almost anywhere as long as the alignment lines in the interface configuration line up properly. I wasn't able to get the camera working at first as I had to email them to find out how to set it up for left handed use. After the email response the next day I was able to flip the image, align the camera, adjust the gain & exposure enough to get it working well. There are microphones in the sensor pad that pickup when the ball is hit and that is what triggers the camera to capture the ball.

ProTee said that the launch angle camera can be setup on either side of the room and used for both left and right handed users WITHOUT having to move the camera. Not that I am a doubtful thomas, but I set it up to test it myself and IT WORKS! This is a very cool feature that will make the system a lot more valuable to the commercial and home setups!

TIP if you are purchasing the launch angle option, be sure that the wall opposite of the camera position has no reflective elements (black background is best).

Onto Playtime... or so I thought.

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Before I brought my right-handed instructor in for testing I decided to give this a once-over myself. Well I opened up the software and entered the license key and then opened the ProTee under the game tab. The software is the same layout, features, graphics as the P3Pro premium courses so I was easily able to navigate my way to the driving range. I hit over 100 shots with various clubs, testing out different combinations of swing path, face angles (open/closed) and launch angles. While almost every combination seemed a reasonable representation, the system would not read an outside in swing path with an open club face no matter what I did in the settings of the game or the interface. Once I was able to replicate the problem, I sent an email to ProTee and they sent me a fix the next day. I installed the new interface and still had the same problem so I sent another email and got a response right away to ensure that the ball track sensor (the front row of sensors on the unit) was on, so I changed that setting and VOILA – it worked! While I am very happy with how ProTee responded to fixing the problem, I was still disappointed that I had to go through this – I mean, am I the ONLY lefty to ever purchase this system? Well at least it is fixed now.

There is currently one other little thing that irks me – the pictures of the clubs on the analytics screen only show a right handed club. While I can still read the text analytics, it is still bothersome to me. That being said, ProTee has confirmed that it is slated for the next update, but it may take a little while to fix.

Analytics

I got to spend some time on the driving range with different clubs and shot types, strengths, etc. The launch angle camera really put things into perspective and made it a lot more realistic for those shots that weren't hit square. I did also try hitting clubs with a different club selected (ie: hitting a 6 iron with a 9 iron selected in the software). Well it DID make a difference and I confirmed with ProTee that the club is used to help calculate distance and spin so although it may be close if you have a club up or down, it will not be spot on. This would still make playing a round a lot easier as the clubs are selected for you based on the distance away, so you could be a club out, not touch the computer and still get a decent reading.

The analytics window is very detailed and gives you almost every reading you could ever ask for. I personally just look at the analytics that are actually measured as the calculations can be off with any system.



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The system directly measures:

- Club Head Speed
- Club Face Angle
- Club Face Relative to Path
- Sweet Spot Deviation (left/right)
- Swing Path
- Swing Tempo
- Ball Launch Angle (with the launch angle camera on)
- Ball Path (with the ball track on)
- Ball Speed (with the ball track on)

The analytics window shows up after every shot for a time you specify (up to 10 seconds) or not at all if you want.

It was nice to see all of the shots visually as well as actual numbers that I found to be very accurate. Overall with all of my shots the readings were good, but I think that the spin rate was slightly off which is acceptable since we know that there is no direct spin measurement.

Time to bring on the pro...

Well I find it is always best to ask the pro, so I had our golf instructor come in for a test drive (and to play a round with me to determine the game play feel).

Here is a video of the instructor's testing of the system on the driving range:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2POW_6r-1U

**Note that when the instructor came in for the testing, we did NOT have the launch angle camera setup due to the lighting during the time that we could get him. However, being that his shots are basically on par with the loft of the clubs that are in the software, the accuracy is almost the same as having the launch angle camera on.*

As you can see from the video, Al's shots came up just as he called them. This was very impressive from both of our standpoints. Al tried a number of different clubs and shot types and agreed that the system is very accurate (within about 2 to 3%).

It was at this point where we tested the AlmostGolf balls vs the regular balls. There was a very noticeable difference in the distance and a slight difference in the ball spin. With the calibration that you can do with the interface, you could easily setup this system to be used with AlmostGolf balls.

GAME ON!

We both were anxious to test the simulator out on the course where it really counts, so away we went. Back to the main menu, into game mode and then the big questions – which of the 75 courses to play?

TIP A full list of the ProTee United courses are available at:

<http://www.protee-united.com/golfsimulator/golf-courses>

We found the course selection almost daunting, but chose the Cour d'Alene course to compare it to the version on the aboutGolf system.

The game setup options are fantastic and you can setup each player with their own profile and even their own camera views.

While I won't go into all of the details of each option, here are the features of each section:

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Game Type Selection:

- ProTee Play – Select a specific course, weather conditions, etc.
- Network Play – Play against others over the internet or in a local network.
- Challenges – Play a nearest pin or longest drive competition.
- Practice – Train yourself on any hole on any course.

** We only had time to play the ProTee Play*

Course Selection:

- 75 Courses to choose from

Hole Selection:

- Front Nine
- Back Nine
- Select All
- Select Any Hole(s)

Player Selection:

- Select from a list of setup players or create new ones

Player Creation:

- Allows you to specify:
 - Name
 - Male/Female
 - Right/Left handed
 - Clubs in bag
 - Skill/Accuracy level
 - Picture
 - Camera view preferences
 - Ball color & logos

Game Options:

- Tee Position (varies for each course – ie: Gold, Blue, White, Red)
- Pin Placement (Easy, Default, Hard)
- Scoring (Strokeplay, Stableford, Modified Stableford or Match play)
- Course Conditions (Soft, Normal, Dry)
- Mulligans (1/Hole, 2/Hole, 3/Hole, None, Unlimited)
- Gimmies (None, 20", 40", 60", 80", 100", All)

Play Conditions:

- Weather (Clear, Cloudy, Showers, Rain)
- Wind (None, Light, Medium, Strong)
- Time (6 AM to 6 PM)

The time of day is really cool, as it not only changes the lighting, but it changes the shadowing too.

For our game, we pretty much ran through the defaults.

Right away we noticed how fast the load time was (about 12 seconds) – this is extremely fast as this software loads the entire course so you don't have to wait between holes for the hole to load.

Teeing off, we both noticed that due to the depth of the sensor pad, we had to use longer tees to get it where we would normally get the height to. By the next time we teed up, this was not a problem.

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The drives off of the tee felt good as there was little or no contact with the ground the same as being on the tee box on a regular course. The distances were almost spot on to our normal drives and we both found the fairway to allow the ball to roll a little longer than it should (but there is a setting in the interface to slow this down).

Our fairway shots were just as good, but now we had hit off of the fibre grass top surface. Since we live in a very dry climate, the shots felt a little forgiving – it was more like we were playing on a moist fairway in Florida.

Once on the green we tried putting with and without the green grid on. The grid has a similar style as the aboutGolf system where the lines are up and there are little markers that move along the lines to show the direction and speed of the undulations.

We both didn't like how the ball bounced off of the cutouts in the turf where the sensors were; however it did a decent job of reading the putts. The turf that I cut out was only friction fit to the sensor, so I feel if it was a permanent installation where we could adhere the sensor to the turf, there would be less of a bump and therefore a smoother putt. That being said, we found that the additional putting sensor is required if you want to properly putt on the system. You can putt off of the hitting sensor pad, but you have to ensure your head does not interfere with the light between the ball and the sensor (it must be the ball that creates the shadow and not your head ☺)

For the next holes we played different shots to get into different lies and distances where we could test out how diverse the system could read, and we both found it to be a really good experience somewhat comparable to playing on the aboutGolf system (although the preference would still be an aboutGolf simulator if there is an unlimited budget).

The system also gives you a choice of how much distance to take off for bunker and rough lies which is nice if you find those shots too forgiving or too hard.

Support

ProTee was there every step of the way with our testing and they were very accommodating. Overall, I was very impressed with the level of service and commitment to the sales AND post-sales support.

Summary

Overall, the system works very well - it is great for those wanting an accurate system for club and ball information. It would be suitable for both commercial and home setups and could provide accurate analysis and simulation with tonnes of great courses to choose from.

For those that want a system that measures ball spin or those wanting a setup where you can hit off of multiple surfaces, we would recommend a camera system like the ForeGolf system instead.

If you have any questions on our testing, the simulator, or any other simulator, you can contact me at any time at cory@par2pro.com.

Feel free to drop me a line to tell me if you liked or disliked this review and/or what you would like to see in future reviews. I am always open to constructive criticism and hope to help the industry with professional unbiased reviews.

Keep Your Eye On The Ball,

Cory Gauvreau
Par2Pro