

WORLD FOOTWEAR

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MAGAZINE FOR THE GLOBAL SHOE INDUSTRY



Materials for linings and uppers
Dieless cutting makes a difference
Heels without pain
Deckers steers UGG away from sheepskin



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Cover: footwear from the latest collection from fashion brand Camel Active.

Image: Camel Active

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News

GERMANY In keeping with statements it made in October last year, sports brand Puma launched a new shoe called the InCycle Basket on February 12. However, its launch announcements included none of the controversial "environmental cost" comparisons with leather that the company made when it began talking about the new product. Upper materials Puma has used in the InCycle Basket include organic cotton and linen. The sole is composed of a new biodegradable plastic called APINATbio, which can be shredded into its component materials and composted to go back into the ecosystem.

SWITZERLAND A prominent Swiss footwear manufacturer has had to close down just one year short of its centenary. Nuova Benelli, founded by Amos Benelli in Morbio in the Ticino canton in 1914, made fashion shoes for men and women. Nuova Benelli supplied high-end footwear outlets in all parts of Switzerland. It cited difficult market conditions as the reason for closing its doors. The closure means the loss of 27 jobs at the Morbio factory.

ITALY Luxury brand Ferragamo has announced revenues for 2012 of more than €1.1 billion. This represents an increase of 17% compared to the figures for 2011. The company said on releasing the results that its commitment to "top-quality products [with footwear and leathergoods among the most prominent components of its collections] and Made in Italy values" had helped it become a billion-euro brand. By the end of 2012, Ferragamo had more than 3,000 employees and a network of more than 600 single-brand store worldwide.

COLOMBIA To keep the local footwear industry competitive, the Colombian government is to impose a tariff of \$5 per pair, plus 10% of value will be added to imported footwear. The "specific tariff" will mainly affect the cheapest imports, as those imported at a "fair price" will benefit from a decrease in taxation from 15% to 10%. The measure will initially be implemented for six months, while the government reviews the situation and decides on more permanent anti-dumping measures.

BRAZIL The president of Brazilian footwear industry association Abicalçados, Milton Cardoso, has said a trade surplus of \$5 billion that his member companies achieved in the recent past had fallen to \$1 billion in 2012 because of the volume of cheap imports still coming into Brazil. The government confirmed it will work with Abicalçados to put anti-dumping measures in place for footwear imports from Vietnam and Indonesia. Similar measures are already in place for imports from China.

SPAIN Spain's footwear components manufacturers' association AEC has written to the country's central tax authority to complain about delays in paying refunds of value added tax to exporting companies. AEC president, Manuel Román, has confirmed after discussions with some of his 600 member companies that footwear components manufacturers are owed a combined total of at least €6 million, and that the true figure could be as high as €10 million.

BANGLADESH

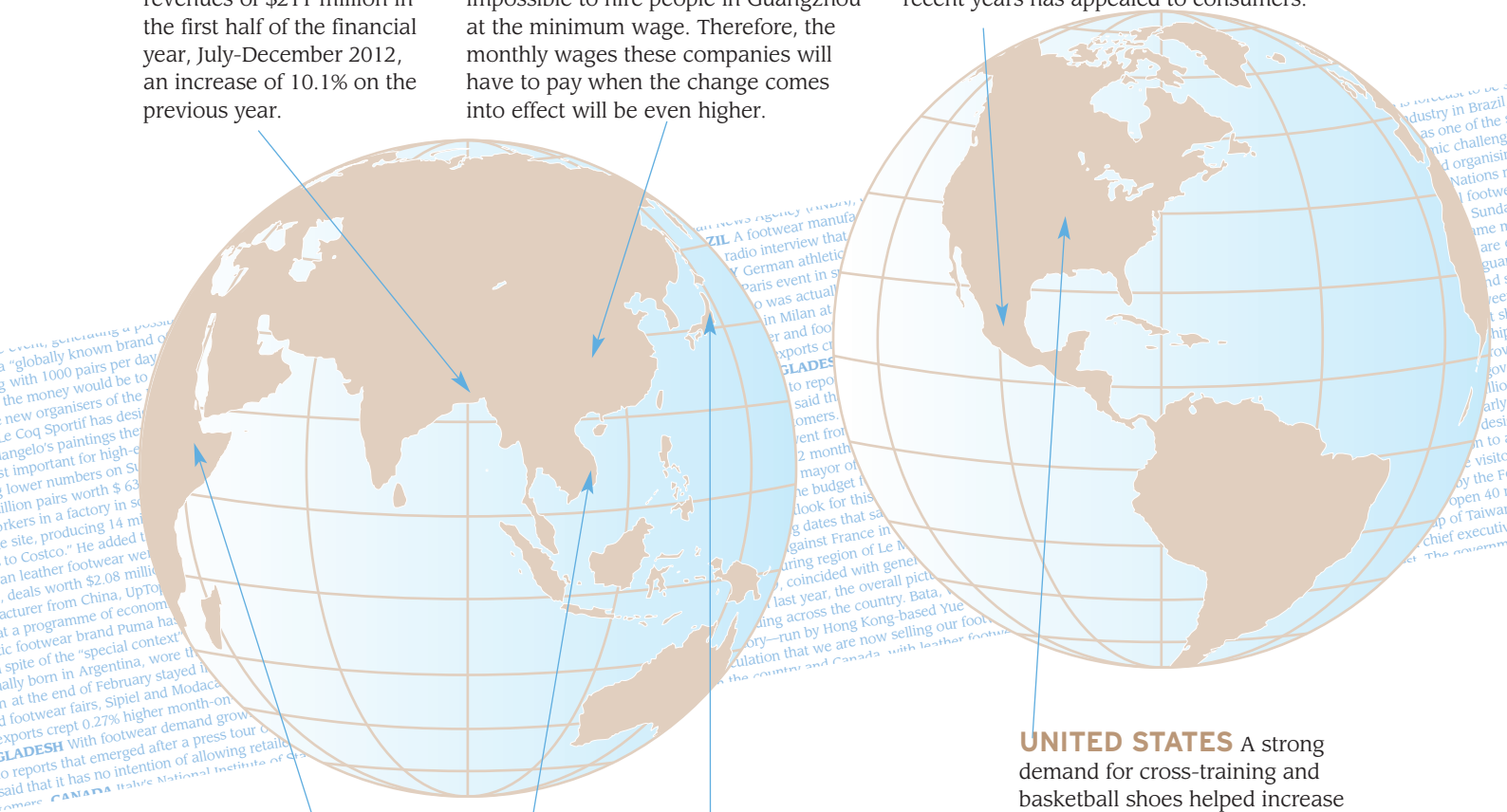
According to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) of Bangladesh, the country's leather industry performed well in the first six months of the current financial year, beating a target for export revenues by 2.3%. Footwear exporters brought in export revenues of \$211 million in the first half of the financial year, July-December 2012, an increase of 10.1% on the previous year.

CHINA

The minimum wage in Guangdong Province will be increased by an average of 19% from May 1, this year, the provincial department of human resources and social security said in a statement in early February. In the provincial capital, Guangzhou, minimum wage levels will rise by 19.2% to around \$250 per month. Many businesses complain that it's impossible to hire people in Guangzhou at the minimum wage. Therefore, the monthly wages these companies will have to pay when the change comes into effect will be even higher.

MEXICO

Mexican footwear firms exported 24 million pairs in 2012, bringing in revenues of almost \$520 million. Commenting on the figures, the president of Ciceg, the footwear industry association in Guanajuato (the biggest footwear-producing state), Ysmael López García, said the Mexican Shoes label is starting to make an impression on consumers in overseas markets. Mr López said the design and fashion content Mexican producers have been able to include in recent years has appealed to consumers.



ETHIOPIA Indian footwear group Farida has established a tannery in Ethiopia, about 70 km from Addis Ababa. The company is self-sufficient in sourcing raw materials through its subsidiaries, and the Ethiopian unit has been set up through Farida's subsidiary in Singapore. Farida employs 7,000 people directly and almost double indirectly through the subsidiaries.

JAPAN

Japanese sports footwear brand ASICS increased its sales in the first nine months of its financial year for 2012-2013 (ending December 31) by 2.3% compared with the same period the previous year. The total sales for the nine-month period were close to \$2.1 billion. It also said that sales in the fourth quarter had been strong and that it expects to post an even bigger sales increase in its full-year figures for 2012. It said its shoes and apparel for performance running and tennis had been its strongest categories, with other court sports, volleyball and handball also performing well.

VIETNAM

The country's Ministry of Industry and Trade is targeting export turnover of \$8 billion this year, an increase of 10.4% over last year, which it hopes will be driven mainly by sport shoes. It urged the footwear industry to increase the production of raw materials so that 60% per cent of the industry's demand can be satisfied by domestic materials, instead of relying on imported components. Footwear manufacturers are working with the garment and textile industries to establish an industrial complex specialising in producing footwear accessories.

UNITED STATES

A strong demand for cross-training and basketball shoes helped increase athletic footwear revenues across the US last year by 4%, according to research company NPD. Sales of athletic footwear in the US grew to \$13.8 billion in 2012, according to NPD. Volume was relatively flat, but the increase in prices led to the growth in revenue. While basketball and cross-training saw double-digit growth, performance in other categories, such as baseball and football boots, dragged overall figures down. Athletic footwear sales dropped 3% for the women's business last year, while men's grew 6% and children's 12%.

● The Jones Group, which owns footwear brands including Kurt Geiger, Stuart Weitzman, Brian Atwood and Carvela, has reported fourth quarter 2012 results up 9% and full year 2012 revenues up 1%. Its footwear brands, alongside accessories, were its best performers, and its international segments performed well.



Footprints

SAGRIPANTI UPS THE ANTE IN SHANGHAI SHOE SHOW SET-TO

The chairman of the Italian footwear manufacturers' association ANCI, Cleto Sagripanti, has welcomed the decision by the Düsseldorf-based GDS high-end footwear exhibition to abandon a plan to run a GDS event in Shanghai in April.

ANCI will host the inaugural edition of Micam Shanghai in the Chinese city from April 9-11 this year and secured an agreement at the end of January that Micam Shanghai will be an official part of the Shanghai Fashion Week.

In the wake of this, GDS announced its decision not to go ahead with a planned event called GDS Select, which it was to run in parallel with the China International Footwear & Leathergoods Exhibition, April 17-19. On learning of the plans for Micam Shanghai, GDS approached ANCI in the summer of 2012 to propose a joint European footwear event in the Chinese city in 2013. ANCI turned this proposal down and went ahead with its own plans.

In response to the GDS decision to pull out, Cleto Sagripanti said: "We're happy with GDS's decision to cancel GDS Select so that the dates won't overlap. This decision responds to the industry's needs, ensuring a consistent, practical international trade fair calendar: an especially important factor in uncertain times like these."

He went on to say that ANCI's priority is "to do the best thing for the companies, which despite their current difficulties continue to believe in the trade fair as a key tool for re-launching the industry".

NICHOLAS KIRKWOOD WINS £200,000 VOGUE PRIZE

British designer Nicholas Kirkwood has become the first accessories designer to win Vogue's fashion fund prize.

The prize, which was presented to the 32-year old at a ceremony in London, includes £200,000 to put toward business development.

British Vogue editor Alexandra



POLITICIAN URGES EUROPEAN COMMISSION TURNAROUND ON SHOE LABELLING

A Spanish member of the European Parliament, Rosa Estaràs, has called on the European Commission in Brussels to reconsider a decision not to make labels of origin obligatory on shoes sold in the EU.

Ms Estaràs, who is from the important footwear manufacturing region of the Balearic Islands, said in a formal question she raised in the parliament on February 13 that the lack of information on shoes could mean confusion for consumers.

She said protecting the rights of consumers was one of the things the European Commission did well and urged it to reconsider its decision over shoe labelling.

The Commission had agreed to make labels of origin compulsory, but said at the end of 2012 that it would no longer press ahead with the proposal in its programme of work for this year.

Shulman said: "Nicholas has created a real business in an impressively short amount of time and has become one of the world's most influential shoe designers."

Mr Kirkwood trained at Central Saint Martins and Cordwainers before launching his eponymous label in

2005. His designs are favoured on the 'red carpet', and he branched into men's footwear in January. Last year's winner Christopher Kane was recently bought out by luxury group PPR.

PUMA APPOINTS GENERAL MANAGER FOR EUROPE

Sports brand Puma has announced that Volfango Bondi is its new general manager for Europe, with immediate effect. He succeeds Sergio Bucher, who has decided to leave the company. This follows the announcement towards the end of 2012 of the departures of executive chairman, Jochen Zeitz, and of chief executive, Franz Koch.

Mr Bondi will be based at Puma's headquarters in Herzogenaurach, Germany, and will report to chief commercial officer, Stefano Caroti. He will be responsible for "optimising the efficiency of Puma's business model" in Europe, supported by the general managers of seven European areas DACH (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), Iberia, UK and Benelux, France, the Nordics, eastern Europe and Italy. All seven will report directly to Mr Bondi.

Volfango Bondi joined Puma in 2009 and most recently held the position of director for global sales. He has more than 20 years' experience in the sporting goods industry, having previously worked for Nike in his native Italy and in a pan-European role.

BRITISH FOOTWEAR ASSOCIATION INCREASES SUPPORT FOR TRADE FAIRS

The British Footwear Association (BFA) has announced plans to support its members with a marketing programme concentrating on trade shows including Magic in Las Vegas this February, and MICAM in Milan in March.

This will include new web pages and an email campaign targeted at retail buyers and potential sales agents and distributors.

The BFA has also developed a new international PR strategy, including increased support at the shows

through collaborations with organisers in Italy and the US.

Richard Kottler, chief executive of the BFA, said: "All of the exporting companies will benefit from the tremendous range of activities designed to increase buyer footfall and to attract potential sales agents and distributors across many international markets. All of this comes at a time when British branded footwear has never been in such international demand."

The BFA represents 120 footwear brands, employing around 9,000 people in the UK. There are £6bn worth of shoes sold in the UK every year, and the British footwear industry is currently worth over £500m a year in exports.

UNDER ARMOUR'S FOOTWEAR VICE-PRESIDENT RESIGNS

The senior vice-president for footwear at US-based sportswear group Under Armour is to leave the company at the end of February. Gene McCarthy has overseen the company's efforts to grow market share in the shoe sector since 2009. He led a team that designed several well-received shoes, including a lightweight running shoe called the Spine and the Highlight football cleat.

Chief operating officer Kip Fulks will take over management of the division.

MARCO BRAMANI STEPS DOWN AS VIBRAM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Marco Bramani has resigned as Vibram's chief executive. The grandson of the founder of the specialist soling manufacturer, Mr Bramani has managed the company for the last 25 years.

He developed a new technology centre for Vibram in China and also founded a US subsidiary, as well as launching distinctive products such as the company's Fivefingers line of minimalist footwear.

Antonio Dus has been appointed as the new chief executive. Marco Bramani will continue to be president and chairman of the board of the Lombardy-based company and will focus on the creative development of the brand.

Vibram said the decision had been taken to accelerate the development of

the brand, especially with regard to innovation and high-performance products. Marco Bramani stated: "We are confident that Antonio will bring a new enthusiasm to this position, especially in the North American market where he has solid experience and expertise."

SIX STUDENTS REACH FINAL OF MODA FOOTWEAR DESIGN CONTEST

Footwear design students at De Montfort University in Leicester will compete for industry recognition as part of a joint project between the university and the Moda footwear exhibition in

Birmingham.

Now in its fifth year, the project, History in the Making, will provide six finalists from the university's footwear design course with a showcase for their shoe design ideas at the Moda exhibition, which takes place in Birmingham from February 17-19.

The six finalists this year are Summer Spencer from Leicester, Maya Nishimura from Japan, Emma Brown from Leicester, Natasha Leanne McAnuff from Sheffield, Hannah Binns from the Wirral and Jenifer Moffat from Cambridgeshire.

A judging panel will select the winning design at the exhibition. 



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Products & Services



STAHL INDIA OPENS GLOBAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR FOOTWEAR FINISHING

Specialty chemicals manufacturer Stahl officially opened a new centre of excellence for manufacturing its range of aftercare and shoe finish products. The centre has been built within the compound of Stahl India's manufacturing complex in Ranipet, an important centre for leather production in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

The official opening was performed by group chief executive, Huub van Beijeren, along with Stahl India managing director, Tuncay Deriner.

Mr Van Beijeren said it was a proud moment for the Stahl Group and that the new centre is the only facility of its kind in India dedicated to manufacturing products especially for the shoe industry, giving customers access to up-to-date products that are fully compliant with the latest legislation. He added that this demonstrated Stahl's "continued commitment to the leather and shoe sector at a time of uncertainty in the industry".

Stahl has been active in India for more than 35 years, and its plant in Ranipet started operating in April 2000. The new plant has the capacity to make almost 3,000 tonnes of product for use in the shoe industry, leathersgoods manufacturing and aftercare markets.

SATRA OFFERS TECHNICAL FOOTWEAR SEMINARS

Specialist research and testing organisation SATRA is running a series of technical seminars in its China office in Dongguan in March.

The first seminar, on March 19, is

'Taking the risk out of footwear' and is for SATRA members only. The seminar will advise on ensuring products are safe and fit for purpose and will cover product risk assessment; leather use in manufacture and grading; heel attachment; sole bonding; slip and safety assessment; and avoiding consumer complaints.

The second event, on March 20, is open to members and non-members and will focus on European safety footwear testing and personal protective equipment. The morning session will explain the mandatory testing and will include lab demonstrations of critical tests. Delegates will be able to bring samples of their footwear to discuss testing and any technical problems.

OLYMPICS BOOST FOR CAMBRELLE'S LONG-TIME PARTNER

The London 2012 Olympics proved a boost to consumer confidence and to sportswear brands the world over. The producer of shoe lining Cambrelle is proud to have supported adidas, the official sportswear partner of the Games, in its footwear concepts, after it was recently named the fourth most-loved brand of the year by social media measurement agency Dachis.

Dachis maintains an index that monitors user sentiment covering 10 billion social actions, and said adidas had added 34 million new fans in 2012.

"Adidas is one of our biggest customers sourcing our products out of Asia," says Camtex Fabrics chief executive, Kieran O'Hare. "It supplied uniforms for 3,000 athletes at the Olympics, and was worn by numerous medal winners. It sponsored many successful athletes including Team GB's Jessica Ennis and Jamaican sprinter Johan Blake, and its achievements in this arena should be celebrated."

Cambrelle is a fast-wicking, highly absorbent, abrasion-resistant fabric that is trusted by many of the world's leading shoe brands. It is made by UK-based Camtex Fabrics, which has supplied adidas since 2005.

Adidas anticipates record sales and earnings for last year, in part due to its Olympics exposure. It invested £100 million to promote the brand on the global Olympic stage. It has used Cambrelle linings in its heritage range for seven years, adding comfort, durability and moisture management capabilities. Cambrelle linings look after customers' feet as well as the shoes, by locking moisture away from the uppers, preventing staining and mildew build-up.

NEW SHOE AND LEATHERGOODS TESTS FOR PHTHALATES IN TURKEY

Leathergoods and footwear are among the products that the Turkish government plans to subject to a new regime of testing for phthalates. It has accredited two laboratories in Istanbul to carry out the tests.

According to the Turkish authorities, leathergoods manufacturers in some countries still use leather finishing products that contain the substances, for example di-buthyl phthalate, added as a plasticiser to nitrocellulose lacquers.

Responding to REACH regulations, the Turkish government has put strict restrictions on the use of phthalates and has given the Istanbul laboratories responsibility for analysing and certifying consumer products, including leathergoods and shoes, imported into the country.

TECHNOLOGY CENTRE TO PRESS AHEAD WITH RECYCLED PU FOR SOLING

La Rioja's centre for footwear technology (CTCR), situated in the Spanish footwear manufacturing hub of Arnedo, has announced that it will go ahead with a project to use recycled polyurethane (PU) to make soles.

Working with a partner research centre in Valladolid, the CTCR will work on new methods of recycling the material to make the PU suitable for soling applications. It expects two local components suppliers, Garmaryga and Cauchos Ruiz-Alejos, to have prototypes ready later this year. ☺

Backtrack

World Footwear's publishing cycle and limitations on space make it impossible for us to run more than a carefully selected sample of news from across the industry. However, we publish hundreds more stories on **www.footwearbiz.com**. The site is updated every day with news from every continent and every part of the industry, making footwearbiz.com one of the most

comprehensive archives of news anywhere on the web for the global footwear industry.

We list below just a few of the headlines that have appeared on the site in recent weeks —

www.footwearbiz.com allows you to read those you have missed.

15.02.13

Volcom to launch full shoe collection

07.02.13

Taiwanese firm lays off 2,500 employees in Indonesia
FDRA raises objections to proposed extra tax on athletic shoes

05.02.13

Sympatex-lined snowboard boot among winners at ISPO
Adidas launches new rugby boot

04.02.13

Footwear exports up 18% in Jinjiang city

01.02.13

Footwear revenues up 43% at Under Armour
ANPIC wants local manufacturers to

pick Mexican suppliers

31.01.13

Deckers blames high skin prices and warm weather for "challenging year"
Ecco to make its mark at Pebble Beach Pro-Am
Nike launches Flyknit "for the street"

28.01.13

Tod's: sales up 8% in 2012

25.01.13

Bata replaces chief executive in Pakistan

24.01.13

Chatham takes inspiration from equestrian sport

17.01.13

Couromoda closes with positive news

for the Brazilian footwear market

Adidas expects "considerable" growth in outdoor sector shoes

15.01.13

Valentino to partner with Semilla di Levane in new venture
CTC's book on leather industry launched in English
English rugby league referees secure new boot deal

14.01.13

Japan: surge in demand for Vietnamese shoes
High-profile Spanish fashion designer makes first move into shoes

11.01.13

Belle opens 890 stores in 2012
ZEM opts for Poron protection in minimalist shoes

NEW

Cork-latex footbeds with antibacterial effect



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ALL CREDITS: CAMKIDS GROUP PLC



2013 marks the 35th anniversary of China's one-child policy, a strategy that has prevented 300 million to 400 million births, according to the government. But while the jury is out on the long-term social effects of the strategy, Camkids sees it as the reason for its growth into one of the largest children's footwear brands in China.

The little emperors' new shoes

"It has created a nation of pessimistic, risk-averse little emperors" is the damning conclusion of a recent report on China's one-child policy by *Science* magazine, which studied the behavioural impacts on children of the controversial strategy, established 35 years ago to tackle the negative consequences of a booming population. The government claims it has prevented between 300 million and 400 million births in that time, leading to a more prosperous and stronger economy. In recent months, however, rumblings in the Chinese parliament suggested its opposers were gaining support, but the rumours were quashed in January when Wang Xia, the minister in charge of the National Population and Family Planning Commission, announced that the one-child policy is here to stay. "The policy should be a long-term one and its primary goal is to keep a low birth-rate," he said.

One company that has undoubtedly benefitted is Fujian Province-based Camkids, which started life in 1994 as a children's shoe manufacturer supplying to clients such as Italy's Geox and Fila. It has recently floated on AIM (Alternative Investment Market), the junior market of the London Stock Exchange, raising £5.4 million.

"Because of the one-child policy, there is a 4-2-1 family model, with four grandparents at the top and two parents. All the focus and all the attention is on the only child, and with the increase in disposable income in China, grandparents and parents are spending more on the child," says Camkids chief financial officer, Pei Eng.

Its products are marketed at the mid to high end of the market, aimed at middle-income families in tier-one cities. A report by Euromonitor, a market research company, shows that in 2011 the average expenditure on apparel and footwear on each Chinese child between 0 and 18 was 59% more than in 2007. The result of this has been that, although the number of children between the ages of 0 and 18 has decreased in China since 2007, the market for children's apparel and footwear grew 10% and 11% in 2010 and 2011 respectively. This has enabled Camkids, which launched its first own-named products in 2008, to grow, operating out of more than 1,000 stores across the country.

A league of its own

Its differentiating factor, and one that puts it in the same league as domestic footwear giants Anta and Li Ning, as well as international rivals such as adidas Kids and Nike Kids, is its focus on outdoor sports. From a pure footwear company – which is still its largest market – it branched into offering children's



Camkids chairman Zhang Congming. He is one of an increasing number of people appreciating the great outdoors - he is up at 5am to exercise regardless of the weather.

outdoor clothing and accessories. "At this moment we do not have any direct competition in China," says Ms Eng. "We have the first-mover advantage because this is quite a niche market. We are focusing on the outdoor segment, like hiking, skiing and mountain biking; we are not into general sportswear like tennis or football."

Camkids combines innovation and high-quality materials in its products, which it claims offer more functionality than those of similar companies. In 2011, the top five children's footwear and apparel brands in China accounted for 46% of the market; Nike Kids had a market share of 11.3%, Camkids ranked second with 11.1% and adidas Kids was third with 9.5%. That year, Camkids sold more teenage outdoor footwear than any company in China including Nike Kids and adidas Kids, according to the China Industrial Information Issuing Center Report.

However, unlike Camkids, the likes of Li Ning, Xidelong and, to some extent, Anta are struggling with oversupply and a backlog of inventory. So much so that Li Ning at the end of January announced plans to fundraise, to pull it out of a particularly dark hole – with "substantial" losses expected for 2012. It launched a restructuring plan and management shake-up to address the issue; this compares with Camkids, which, for the year to the end of December 2011, generated revenues of RMB742 million (£74 million) and a profit after tax of £16 million.

The great outdoors

Aside from the one-child policy and increasing disposable income, there are a number of other factors working in Camkids' favour.



A move into children's outdoor clothing has helped set Camkids apart from both domestic and international competitors.

"Chinese are increasingly appreciating going out to greener places to relax, and enjoying the fresh air," explains Ms Eng. "Parents are keen that their child is properly equipped and dressed, and spending more time with the family is becoming the first priority. Schools are also organising more outdoors excursions, creating more awareness in children around such activities. People are more health conscious, too; they are going to the gym and, for example, our chairman and his wife go to the mountain every morning at 5am for exercise, regardless of the weather."

Parks and ski resorts are being constructed, and the government is improving infrastructure – building highways and railways, making the "outdoors" more accessible. "We believe that all these measures and changes in lifestyles work to our advantage," adds Ms Eng.

The group operates its own flagship store in Fujian Province, adjacent to its head office and manufacturing facility, but its products are predominantly sold in Camkids branded stores and concessions operated by its network of distributors. It sells on a wholesale basis – a business model that is common in the sportswear industry in China – across 29 provinces, four municipalities and five autonomous regions.

London listing

The company believes there are "huge growth opportunities" in China – one of the reasons it is not looking to expand outside the country, and one which is also behind its decision to go public.

"We chose to float now because we have the first-mover advantage – you don't see any other companies focusing on children's outdoor apparel, footwear and accessories at the moment and we think it's the right time in our development," explains Ms Eng. "We also wanted to raise the company's profile and bring external talent into the group."

"AIM is the most successful growth stock market in the world. It's very stable and credible, a recognised brand, so we feel it is a great advantage to us and our investors because we are a

growing company."

Camkids' strategies include diversifying its product portfolio; strengthening core markets and pushing into new regions; investing in production capacity; building brand loyalty through marketing; and "improving the customers' shopping experience" by introducing new-look stores in the next three to four years.

Camkids chief executive and chairman Zhang Congming comments: "The fundraise and the group's listing in London will help the board to take Camkids forward into the next phase of its development and expedite our growth in this rapidly expanding market."

To verify his predictions, by 2016, the retail sales value of the children and teenagers outdoor sportswear market in China is estimated to reach RMB23.7 billion (£2.4 billion), which is more than double that of 2007, according to Euromonitor.

A society in flux

The Chinese economic strategy has pulled more than 200 million people out of poverty during the past 30 years and, in the last 10, has allowed 60 million children to finish secondary school, who would otherwise not have done so. The negative social effects, as reported by Australian researchers in *Science*, might in that context be seen as a necessary evil.

Ms Eng adds, "Our chairman spoke of the children now and in the past and said he can see a huge difference. He grew up in the 1950s, he came from a poor family background and he therefore had to value every opportunity and treasure what he had. He feels that children nowadays have not gone through the same hardships, and if they're overly pampered they tend to be more risk adverse. But of course the 'little emperors' are so competitive in their own way. Because they are being influenced by their family background and education, and the complex social environment, they are merely pushed in a different way."

What is becoming increasingly important for the only-child generations is the need to differentiate and take the path less trodden if they are to stand out from the crowd. It is a strategy that has worked very well for Camkids. 🌀

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A new report urges Mexico to give high priority to reforming the way it manages water resources. Traditionally water-intensive industries, such as leather production, are being challenged to become much better at managing their use of water, with knock-on implications for the customers they supply.



A water treatment plant in Guanajuato. Other footwear-making states, such as Jalisco, face a more challenging water environment.

CREDIT: WTP

Tough message on Mexican water strategy

Paris-based international economic organisation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has warned that water management in Mexico is now an issue of national security and one that is likely to affect the strategy for the future of many of the country's manufacturing firms, including those that make shoes.

In a report published at the start of 2013, *Making Water Reform Happen in Mexico*, the organisation said that Mexico's river basins are under severe water stress. The quality of rivers, lakes and aquifers is declining and floods, droughts, and hurricanes are becoming more frequent. Mexico's growing population and increasing threats of climate change will worsen the current situation, it warned.

"Mexico can no longer afford the luxury of business as usual," said OECD secretary general, Ángel Gurría, who is Mexican himself, on presenting the report. "Mexico must give high priority to reforming its water sector. It should align and improve federal and river basin policies to increase both the

productivity and cost-efficiency of water policies and ensure that water and agricultural policies are mutually reinforcing."

In 2011, the Mexican government launched a reform programme called the 2030 Water Agenda, aimed at achieving—within 20 years—safe, clean sources of water and a balance between supply and demand for the precious resource among its citizens, farmers and companies. It is the view of the OECD that this shows "clear political leadership" on the part of the Mexican government. However, the organisation goes on to say that, on the ground, it is proving difficult to make water reform happen. "Action is imperative to increase water productivity and the cost-efficiency of water policies," it has said.

Jalisco challenge

Over the past 60 years, the amount of water available for each person in Mexico has declined drastically and more than three-quarters of the population now live in regions with little water. Among the states facing the greatest challenges is

Jalisco, the second-most important shoe manufacturing state in the country (after Guanajuato). In 2009, Jalisco was home to almost 800 footwear manufacturing companies and almost 120 tanneries to supply them with leather. Industry statistics from the same time suggest that Jalisco had a 16% share of Mexico's total of 266,000 footwear industry jobs and its national output of 244 million pairs a year.

Industry, along with irrigated agriculture and increasing urbanisation, is mentioned in the OECD report as having had "disastrous consequences on streams and groundwater quality". Water pollution charges were introduced in 1991 and charge rates were established for some 120 different contaminants (physical, organic and inorganic substances). Currently, the OECD says, the pollution charges are payable for discharges with contaminant concentrations in excess of effluent limits defined by the law for Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) and Total Suspended Solids (TSS), depending on the type of water body. It goes on to say that in 2009, water pollution charges raised the equivalent of \$13.8 million in Mexico. According to the OECD, this represents less than 0.4% of the money that Mexico needs to clean up its bodies of water sufficiently by 2015 to be on track for the 2030 target. The amount needed by 2015 is, the organisation says, almost \$370 million.

Warning signs

It's not difficult to draw the conclusion from this that local authorities in leather- and footwear-producing parts of Mexico, and in other industrial regions of the country, may soon begin to charge more for water services and take a more punitive attitude towards companies that place pressure on water resources and water treatment initiatives. In this respect, the new report from OECD should serve as a warning to shoe producers in Mexico, as well as to their suppliers and customers.



OECD secretary general, Ángel Gurría, left, hands over the report on water to Mexico's new president, Enrique Peña Nieto.

CREDIT: MEXICAN GOVERNMENT

OECD's recommendations are that Mexico establishes greater clarity over who is in charge of regulatory functions for water and sanitation services, with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. Above all, it insists, there needs to be full separation between regulatory functions, service provision and policy making.

"Water has always played a central role in the economic, social and environmental development of countries," Ángel Gurría says in the report. "With the looming challenge of climate change, governments are increasingly recognising the urgency of ensuring the sustainable management of water resources. Successful water policies can set a strong basis for improving the life of all citizens, and the 2030 Water Agenda provides a solid start to this process in Mexico. There is now an opportunity for the new administration [new president, Enrique Peña Nieto, assumed office on December 1, 2012] to make Mexico a leading example of successful water reform in Latin American countries." 



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market demands. Flexibility, versatility and quick response times were the new keywords and a technology that could fully satisfy these new demands was badly needed.

NC (numerically controlled) dieless cutting was, at that time, in its infancy. The basic concept of moving a tool controlled by an appropriate electronic compound and following a cutting path generated digitally by then newly created CAD software applications was a relatively simple one as two-axis flatbed machines already existed in other industries which could be adapted to work for footwear. The real problem was how to physically cut the leather and many other materials that shoe companies have to work with.

In those pioneering times, there was virtually no cutting technology that was not explored, from simple trailing knives to high or low frequency oscillating ones and from water jet to laser. With the appearance of the first market offerings, shoe companies immediately appreciated the potential of these new machines, particularly in terms of flexibility and fast response for product development and sample making. The early generations of dieless cutting machines were therefore to be found in design departments and in sample making lines. For a long time it was assumed that their productivity was too low to really replace existing cutting presses on manufacturing lines and that the old and new technologies would work together side by side. This assumption was, in time, proved wrong and today's dieless cutters find their place more in production than sample making, having now almost completely replaced old cutting systems in most shoe factories in the western world at least.

WHERE ARE WE?

So, how far have die-less cutting technologies come, what is the current state of the art in die-less cutting and what is likely to happen in the future? We can start by looking at how leather and other materials are cut. Different techniques have been studied over time, each of which has shown both advantages and drawbacks of various kinds. The two that more than any others have characterised technological evolution in this area are the high-pressure water jet and the oscillating knife.

The first was long considered to be the fastest and most productive approach for cutting leather and other materials despite all the operational complications the technology presented. Its spread is now relatively limited as, although it is still presently employed by more specialised companies, its use is mainly confined to cutting synthetic materials for shoe components such as toe puffs, counters and insoles.

The method now preferred for cutting leather is the high-frequency oscillating knife or blade. The coupling of low amplitudes of oscillation with higher and higher frequencies has made this the dominant technical approach. The cutting heads of the latest machines make them comparable in terms of both versatility and speed with other systems such as water jet, traditionally considered as being much faster, but with lower purchase and running costs. It can therefore be said that the oscillating knife is today's benchmark for dieless cutting of leather for footwear as well as leathersgoods, furniture and car upholstery. The cost and throughput combination these machines have now achieved has brought companies to regard them as viable alternatives to die-cutting for both production and sample making.

CUTTING HEAD

There are some key features that are present in all latest generation machines that are worth examining and the first is versatility. The trend in shoe companies that adopted dieless cutters is to use them to process the largest possible number of different materials. This does not necessarily mean that all cutting operations are performed with a single machine which could, depending on production demand, cause unacceptable bottlenecks. Instead, the cutting task is concentrated on a single dieless technology but using a variable number of machines according to production volumes that are interchangeable and have clear advantages in terms of maintenance and spare part costs.

An essential element of this versatility is the cutting head that normally contains a large number of other tools in addition to the oscillating blade. Such configurations can hold as many as five to seven different tools simultaneously, ranging from small punches for the execution of holes and notches, to drills and pens. A sound design of the cutting head has a direct impact on two key factors in the actual cutting process: versatility and productivity.



Atom FlashCut 888L 30 UCP flatbed machine. CREDIT: ATOM

Versatility as the robustness of the oscillating blade, its adjustment capability and regulation according to the thickness and toughness of the materials to be cut, determine the range of thicknesses and types of materials the machine is able to handle.

Productivity depends both on the characteristics of the blade and the travelling speed and acceleration of the machine. Productivity is strongly influenced by the availability of special tools such as dies and punches that allow faster execution of geometric details that would otherwise require repeated deceleration and acceleration sequences which would have a marked impact on average cutting speed.

Looking more closely at the cutting head, the elements that characterise it are careful design, compactness, weight (the lighter it is the easier it is to move around quickly), robustness and, finally, the ease with which an operator can perform maintenance tasks or replace blades.

ARCHITECTURE

The quality of a cutting system is not only related to the efficiency of the oscillating blade or the design of the cutting head. Equally important is the way in which the various machine operations that make up the cutting sequence such as loading material, inspecting hides for defects, nesting patterns, actual cutting and then collecting cut pieces are organised and managed. Which and how many of these operations take place simultaneously and in what areas of the machine depends on its architecture as designed by its manufacturer. After several years of experimentation and consolidation, the solutions proposed by producers of cutting systems have somehow converged on two standard architectures.

Flatbed machines (horizontal or inclined) having a rectangular working area and lateral loading of the material. These are also known as dual-station systems where under normal operating conditions cutting is in parallel (hidden time) with unloading – nesting – loading. The placement of the patterns on the hide is interactive (performed by the operator) and assisted by the projection of the shapes on to the



Comelz CZ/L conveyor belt machine with two cutting heads. CREDIT: COMELZ

material by means of one or more LCD or other technology projectors to ensure high visibility on any type of material. There are several systems with this architecture, both with single and double cutting heads (a second head considerably increases potential productivity).

Conveyor machines are more automated as the material is loaded from the front and fed through the machine on a moving belt. This allows great operational flexibility thanks to the possibility of working with both front loading – unloading by executing in parallel the same operations as flatbed machines, cutting in parallel with unloading – positioning – loading and front loading and unloading from the back. In the last instance, the tasks performed in parallel are loading – nesting / cutting / unloading. Solutions of this type generally adopt a double cutting head and pattern nesting is interactive as in the previous case.

A third emerging architecture is one that we could call 'ultra-compact'. Dieless cutting started out with sample making and then evolved into a production technology. Many producers are now going back to developing specific, compact models designed to satisfy low production demands either in small workshops or design departments of larger factories. Mono stations with approximately the same footprint as an old clicking press and, in the case of the Comelz CZ/P

very much the same appearance, they are ideal for 'rapid prototyping' of shoes and low volume production.

SOFTWARE

Among the most important advantages of modern cutting systems is the ability to go rapidly from design to production. Once a new model or variant of an existing one is ready in the form of CAD 2D files, the necessary information is available for the various parts that make up the shoe to be cut without having to wait for traditional cutting dies to be made. An important element of this segment of the production chain is the ease or 'interoperability' with which the geometry generated by a CAD system is transferred to a cutting machine. The prerequisite for interoperability is the use of a standardised and common form of representation of geometric and process data, exchanged between CAD systems and cutting machines.

As an example of the relevance of this topic, the most important Italian manufacturers have adhered to a standard proposed by ASSOMAC, the Italian association of shoe machinery producers, to overcome this difficulty and the solutions they offer are more easily interchangeable and can be integrated one with another. In order for a machine to operate rapidly and efficiently, there are some key features in the software that controls it that are very important:



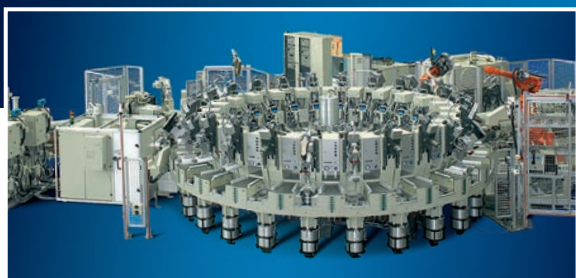
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Comelz CZ/P mono station machine.

CREDIT: COMELZ



- Ease of aggregation of the patterns according to batch size or other criteria that influence the organisation of the cutting job.
- Integration of the machine software directly with the order processing system of the company through the direct import of cutting bills.
- Proper and efficient distribution of cutting tasks depending on the materials to be cut between different machines in the cutting room.
- Monitoring of cutting activities and of the instantaneous production throughput with a continuous and accurate overview of quantities actually produced.

From this point of view the shift from manual to digital cutting significantly increases the level of control over the process itself, the reliability and accuracy of the operations involved, as well as reducing the risk of errors or failures in production.

NESTING

If a multi-tool head and clever machine architecture to a large extent determine the versatility and productivity of a system, the cutting efficiency and therefore, ultimately, the cost of the finished product depends on how well the task of preparing the cutting layout is executed. When placing or nesting the various shapes on the hide, the aim is to achieve the best combination between the time

needed to perform the task and the highest possible material yield. In modern dieless cutting systems this can be performed by the operator with the help of software programs and normally referred to as 'interactive nesting' or either in whole or in part automatically by just the software itself which we call 'automatic nesting'.

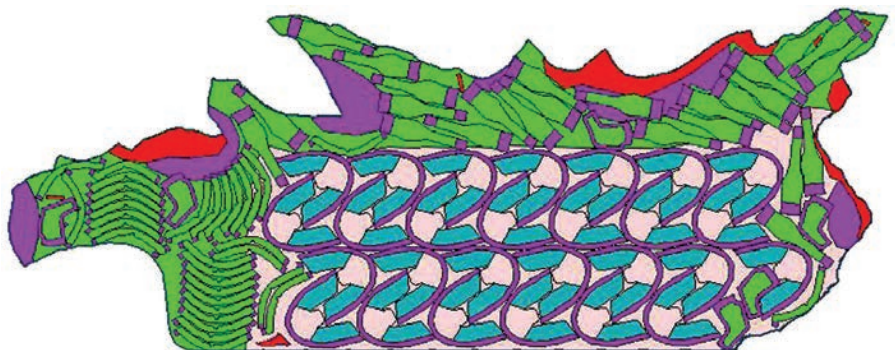
The most common nesting approach, at least for cutting leather, is the interactive one in which the operator uses their experience of products and materials to perform the task. The software facilitates and speeds up the work so that the operator can focus on the primary task of producing a layout with the minimum waste in the shortest possible time. In this operating mode, the typical advantages of automatic cutting are very clear as the operator is able to assess the quality of the layout overall rather than just progressively as in manual cutting where one pattern is

placed at a time. It is also possible to correct a wrong positioning or even the entire layout before starting to cut, which is impossible with traditional die cutting.

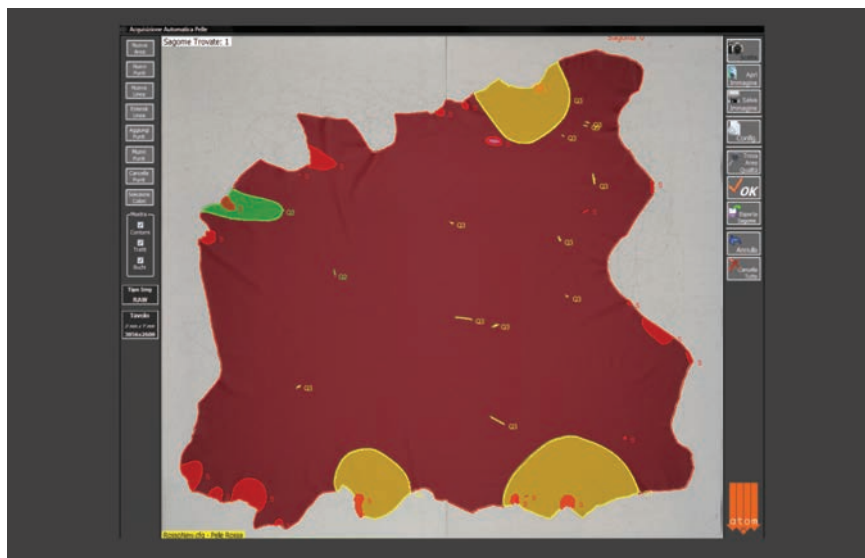
Thanks to this, the cutting efficiency that can be achieved with these machines is very high and at least equal to, if not better, than those obtained by traditional methods. The winning features of an interactive nesting software program are the simple and efficient importing and managing of cutting bills, rapid nesting and ease of use combined with an always clear view of the patterns projected on the hide. When the material to be cut is synthetic, typically in sheets or rolls, nesting is performed by automatic programs which calculate the optimal arrangement of shapes with very high levels of efficiency whether directly on the machine or off-line on a separate PC. The hardware resources of the machine which the latter method does not use can then be dedicated solely to intensive cutting.

MAKING A CHOICE

A versatile multi-tool head, clever architecture and good nesting software are therefore the key ingredients for a successful dieless cutting system and the market now offers plenty of choices from which companies can find the optimal solution for their particular needs. The number of producers is also quite large. Italian company Teseo together with Zund from Switzerland were pioneers in the sector with bigger companies such as Atom and Comelz soon joining them, followed by Elitron, Torielli, Newlast and many others that in time expanded the group. Choosing between one producer and another and deciding which model to buy within the incredibly large choice available from



Interactive nesting uses the operator's experience to maximise cutting yield. CREDIT: ATOM



Detecting leather defects needs further attention. CREDIT: ATOM

general machine performance. In fact, the more the operator is assisted with nesting, the faster they will work and the more likely it will be that nesting time balances the other operations to provide the best overall system performance.

Look at the range of different materials, thicknesses and formats (sheets or rolls) that the system can handle in relation to its cutting technology and architecture. The wider the range, the more possible it will be to concentrate all cutting operations on one single technology with all the related scale and maintenance advantages. And, think about a conveyor belt system as this again contributes to flexibility and overall performance.

WHERE TO NOW?

What can we expect in terms of future development in an area where it seems technological evolution has reached its maturity? Well, there are still some fields of ongoing development left and one of them is automatic leather defect recognition. Despite all the recent achievements, experienced operators are still needed in order to identify faulty areas and localised flaws in the hide and to digitally mark them in dedicated 'hide inspection stations' normally as part of an off-line nesting calculation. Although this area of investigation has not so far received much attention it is plausible that, thanks to the availability of new sensors and advances in computation techniques, it may be revitalised in the near future. Automatic nesting on leather is also not fully accomplished, with some effort needed to further improve the global performance in terms of yield the software can achieve.

A higher level of integration of upstream (material handling and synthetic materials with design features thought to optimise cutting) and downstream (robotised collection of cut parts) operations is also to be expected, with an evolution of the 'old' dieless cutting tables into more powerful and complete cutting systems. Despite affirmation of its viability as a production procedure, maturity of its design and dramatic technological advances, dieless cutting although now out of its infancy is still in its first youth and more growth is to be expected in the future. 🌀

these companies is not easy, so here is a 'checklist' of features to look out for when making a choice.

Consider the size of the machine's working area to see if it suits company needs. ***This is probably the first and most important choice criterion.*** If there are no space limitations in the factory that could force the adoption of mono station systems that have much lower productivity, choose one with a large cutting area that can accommodate even the biggest hides. A conveyor belt machine could offer a good compromise between the size of the cutting area and the compactness of the system. If the main use of the machine will be cutting sheets of synthetic material, compact mono station machines are preferable. Opt for a supplier that can offer a wide range of different solutions in terms of architectures and cutting areas.

Check the quality of the mechanical design of the machine. This is evident in the mechanical parts of the system which must be stiff and robust as this has a great impact on the quality of cutting; neither should they be exaggerated or over sized. Also check their quality and accuracy of assembly. This is particularly important in regard to delicate elements such as the cutting bed which must be perfectly flat as this is again crucial for high quality cutting.

Pay attention to the choice of all mechanical, pneumatic and electronic components. These must be of the highest quality and durability considering the intensive use that the machine will undergo during its life.

Test the vacuum system that holds the material to be cut in place as this is another crucial factor. An efficient vacuum system must be able to keep the material in position no matter in which area of the bed the head is moving and also when large sections of the cutting surface remain uncovered. Its efficiency is also important. Is it able to concentrate suction force only where needed as this depends on the size and power of the pump driving the system which, in turn, determines the amount and cost of electricity used.

Verify the number and type of tools in the cutting head as the more there are the less often will it be necessary to stop the machine to manually change one and so the higher its productivity will ultimately be. How robust is the oscillating knife, the thickness range it can operate with, its adjustment possibilities and, finally, the combined oscillating amplitude / frequency that eventually determines the cutting speed.

What is the machine's dynamic behaviour as expressed by its maximum linear speed (m/min) and rate of acceleration (g) as these are two factors combined that influence overall cutting performance the most in terms of pieces per minute.

Carefully assess (and possibly test) the machine's architecture as this, together with the other factors already mentioned, greatly contributes to the average production output of the whole system expressed as pairs per shift.

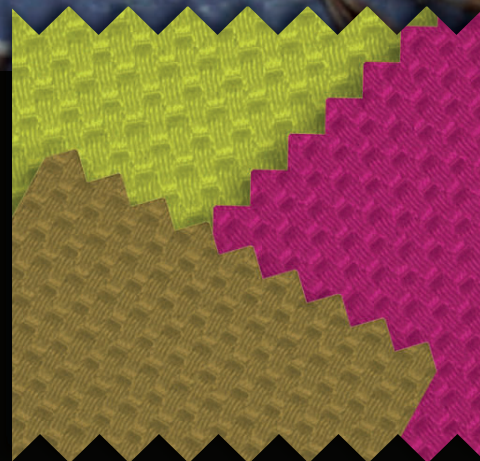
Test the effectiveness, ease of use and stability of the interactive nesting software. This element also influences

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ALL CREDITS: MARQUITA VOLKEN



Primary patterns

MARQUITA VOLKEN, LAUSANNE SHOE MUSEUM

Creating upper patterns has traditionally been considered the most skilled aspect of shoemaking. It must combine practicality in terms of fit, access for the foot, a reliable means of fastening and acceptable styling combined with economy in the amount of material used. Leather has always been expensive and shoemakers always caught between the 'rock' of cost and the 'hard place' of what customers would pay. As a result, despite being skilled, they were usually also relatively poor.

Prior to mechanisation in the late 19th century, with the exception of boots for the military, footwear was made individually for each customer. Shoemakers also had to work fast in order to earn a decent living so simplicity in cutting and stitching that reduced work content and time spent were also important. Nevertheless, a rich variety of footwear has been produced over the centuries. Discovering how it evolved into the shoes we know today has not been without its problems.

METHODOLOGY

In any form of research, a methodology and typology is needed in order to organise all the information. Those used in relation to archaeologically recovered footwear have not until now taken a common approach. One reason is the sheer complexity where the variety of styles, fashions and techniques involved makes it difficult to clearly detect the underlying principles necessary for a typological hierarchy. The few examples recovered from Prehistory are not enough to warrant such organisation, while Roman footwear is simply identified by 'trade names' based on the site where the fragments were found and Medieval classed by the method of fastening involved.

Regardless of period, footwear is a highly technical artefact made from many pieces in a multitude of constructions and using a variety of fastenings. In addition, visual appearance or styling is influenced by a broad range of socio-economic and cultural factors so that for a correct study, both technical and

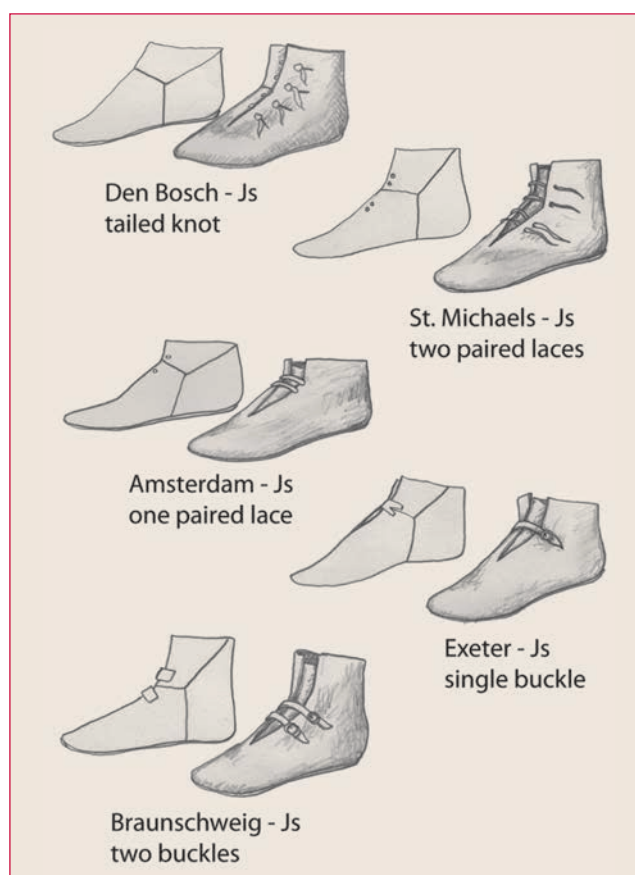


Figure 1 - Js pattern used for five styles based on fastenings shown in descending order; tailed knot, two paired laces, single paired lace, single buckle, two buckles.

stylistic features must be fully understood. Visual appearance simply involves the use of comparative examples and techniques familiar to art historians. Technical aspects although documented, have on the other hand, proved to be far more difficult.

The historical continuity of footwear has been a feature of European archaeological records from early Neolithic times up to the present day and has led to a false assumption that modern shoemaking could furnish information about ancient methods. The technology, tools and skills for handmade leather shoes, already in decline during the nineteenth century, were abandoned during the twentieth in favour of mass-production. This is why the technical aspects of ancient footwear production have remained so elusive.

PRIMARY PATTERNS

One element universal to both however is the cutting pattern for the upper. In medieval footwear only a few basic patterns were used. Style was defined by the fastening; buckle, lace, rolled leather button, tailed leather knot, etc. These could all be applied to a single basic pattern to make several different styles (Figure 1). The fact that all European footwear of the time appeared to share a small, uniform base of upper patterns regardless of cultural, linguistic and geographical differences, provided the starting point for a new approach to the study of ancient footwear.

These have been called 'primary cutting patterns' as they all show the same basic principles and organisation of components. Comparative research has revealed four for the Late Middle Ages, each identified by a letter from the alphabet

that most resembles its overall shape. The 'J' pattern has the front lateral and medial components joined at the centre, with the back ones extending from the lateral side to form a back section that 'wraps around' the heel of the foot and is joined to the front with a 'closing seam'. Lower case letters are used to indicate specific cuts at the instep that allow taller patterns to be cut from a single upper piece. These four primary cutting patterns were all made for shoes with a separate sole (Figure 2).

Further research expanded the scope to cover earlier and later periods. Post medieval saw a gradual disappearance of two of these patterns leaving only the Vq for shoes and the DD for boots in the more modern period (see Shoemaking's big bang, *World Footwear* September/October 2012). The early Middle Ages, on the other hand, showed three additional primary cutting patterns (Z, Q, I) plus five patterns for shoes with an integral sole (B, Y, W, M, U).

Going even further back to the Roman period revealed that almost all the primary cutting patterns known during the Middle Ages were already in existence. While styling was different, the basic principles and shapes were clearly recognisable as being the same. This is remarkable since there is little proof of continuity between the late Roman period and the Middle Ages. European prehistoric leather shoes mostly used only integral-soled patterns as did the Romans but with two additional patterns (O, T).

EXTRAORDINARY CONSISTENCY

The database covering all published European archaeological shoes was able to identify a total of 13 primary cutting patterns, six with integral and seven with separate soles, plus four hybrid-soled patterns that appear during only the 5th to 10th centuries. It could not, however, explain why the same pattern strategies were used continuously from prehistory through to modern times.

The same primary cutting patterns can be found further afield in other cultures and periods. The special boots for playing the Japanese ball game Kemari, popular during the 7th to 13th centuries, featured a -W integral-soled pattern. Those used for Native American footwear can all be placed within one of the European primary patterns, including the -Q, which in Europe is only found in Viking footwear. The traditional

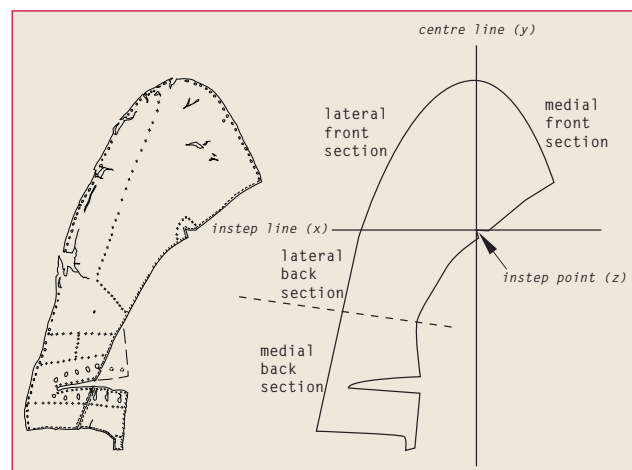


Figure 2 - Drawing of a recovered archaeological shoe and the general shape of a Jn ('n' for insert) primary pattern used for this type of shoe with its various sections indicated.

white boots of the Hopi tribe used a -Q pattern while neighbouring Navajos favoured -J and -V. The -DD and -V type patterns appear as far back as ancient Egyptian and Iranian footwear during the first millennium BC. This astonishing continuity of a few basic primary patterns across the world cannot be explained by cultural or geographic traditions, so technical constraints inherent in the leather used must be responsible.

PROPERTIES OF LEATHER

An animal skin has two directions of stretch, tight or strong along the direction of the backbone and loose or weak across the belly. Basic upper patterns must therefore seek to accommodate both these physical constraints and the proportions of the human foot in order to produce a pair of shoes that fit correctly. Because the constraints are the result of the fibre growth direction of the animal's skin, the solutions provided by these primary cutting patterns must hold true for all types of leather. Furthermore, as the number of practical solutions is limited, so is the number of primary patterns.

These primary patterns also interlock well to maximise yield (Figure 3). The largest quantities of archaeological leather scrap recovered from shoemakers' shops are composed of extremely small pieces. Up until the late 19th century, shoemakers had to be able create such patterns without any complicated formulas, instruction books or measuring devices. This knowledge, like all ancient high-level

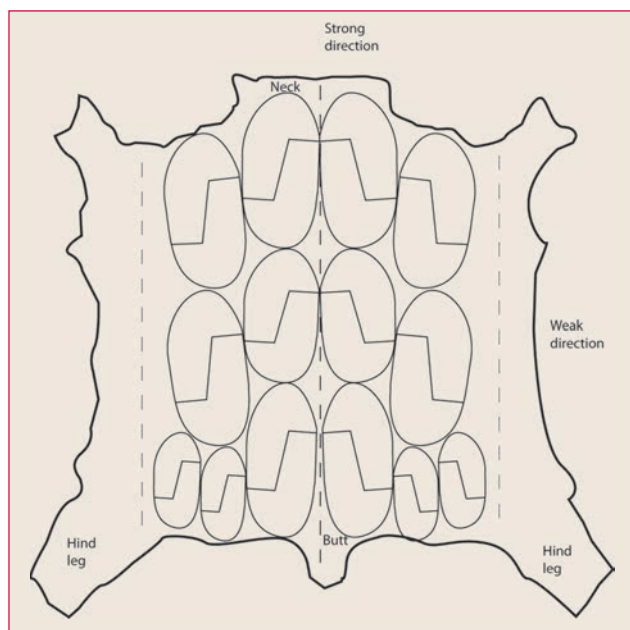


Figure 3 – J pattern laid out on a hide with regard to directions of extensibility.

manual skills, also had to be kept secret as it was a shoemaker's greatest asset. Paper patterns or written rules for calculating sizes and patterns did not exist as they could be stolen and used by anyone wishing to set up as a rival. Today, we only need to buy a software package and all these problems are answered by a machine. 🤖

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Materials keeping ahead

At one time the choice of upper materials available to shoemakers was limited to leather and natural woven fibres such as cotton. That choice is now extremely wide and includes many specialised materials reflecting the diversity of shoemaking itself. Some of these materials are quite unique in the ways in which they provide practical solutions to problems of foot comfort, safety and wellbeing. Having created these successful materials, their producers nevertheless continue to refine and improve them to meet the ever greater expectations of shoemakers and their customers alike.

Snakeguard Extreme

Emtexglobal has its roots deep in the textile trade of Massachusetts, US. Unlike so many others that have long disappeared, it has evolved over the years both as a company and in the nature of its products. It is now a specialty laminator of fabrics for various industries but with footwear still at the core of its business. Emtexglobal continues to manufacture in the US and also works with long established partners in Asia so as to be close to its major customers.

Although the company still supplies laminated fabrics and meshes for major sports shoe brands, Cordura, nylon and polyester fabrics for hiking and hunting boots, and various other upper fabrics and linings for casual footwear, contacts have been cultivated in both the US and Asia that have made it possible to develop advanced proprietary fabrics on an exclusive basis. Snakeguard and Thornshield are good examples and are both a direct result of technology developed jointly between Emtexglobal and one such partner. These two products have played an important part in protecting hunters, farmers and others involved in outdoor activities.

Depending on the actual species involved, snakebites can vary from merely painful to fatal. While avoiding snakes makes sense, it is not always possible and avoiding them is all but impossible in dense undergrowth. A large number of people around the world have to work in such conditions, a great many others go there to hunt for pleasure, while the military in many countries are required to operate in jungle or bush country during both peace and war. Finding an effective way to protect against snakebites to feet and the lower leg was therefore a prime objective over the years until Emtexglobal finally solved the problem with Snakeguard.

The original Snakeguard is a proprietary non-woven item. It is breathable, non-wicking and is approved for use with all waterproof and breathable systems for footwear. It can be supplied with or without a breathable heat activated adhesive coating so that manufacturers can apply it to any area of the upper that they deem to be exposed to potential snake attack. Once laminated to the upper material it has been shown to offer excellent protection against snake bite.

Emtexglobal has now used its expertise in textile technology and past experience gained through Snakeguard



Snakeguard Extreme offers maximum protection against snakebite. CREDIT: EMTEXGLOBAL

to develop the next generation in snake protection which it calls Snakeguard Extreme. This new product now provides maximum protection using a specially developed lightweight laminated fabric which is still non-wicking and breathable.

The company says that there is now no need to combine other bulky fabrics to achieve protection as the fabric stands alone against the biggest snakes. It is lighter and more flexible than the regular product and, as it can be used as is to achieve the greatest protection from any type of puncture, it enables lighter and more flexible boots to be produced which in turn means less fatigue for the wearer at the end of the day. It is available in solid colours or Mossy Oak, Real Tree and True Timber Camo Prints.

MOISTURE-TECH

Humans perspire in order to control core body temperature and prevent damage to vital organs through overheating. It forms on the surface of the skin from which it evaporates so removing heat energy from the body and cooling us down. Hands and feet are first to respond to any need to lose or conserve heat, so footwear has an important effect on how well the process works.

The rate of moisture produced by feet varies between individuals but 10 grams per hour in total is a good average in normal temperatures. Hot conditions or physical exertion can push it much higher, so dispersing effectively aids both foot comfort and health as bacteria and other microbiological growths will flourish in a warm and moist environment.

The breakthrough in effective moisture control for footwear came with the development of membrane interlinings that allowed free passage of moisture out of the shoe but preventing water from entering from the outside. Since then, the technology has become increasingly refined with different producers adapting their products to offer specific features.

Sympatex Technologies of Germany has been a leading supplier of such systems since 1986. It manufactures a range of products specifically aimed at outdoor footwear and clothing based on a special hydrophilic (ability to attract water) membrane that is highly effective in transmitting water vapour while at the same time providing excellent thermal insulation. It is highly breathable, totally waterproof and extremely efficient in regulating the in-shoe environment.

Sympatex has a strong commitment to ecological responsibility and so this membrane is also 100% recyclable with both bluesign and Öko-Tex-Standard 100 certification. It is also completely PTFE-free, so it ticks all the environmental boxes. It is in fact a clever copolymer of oxygen, carbon and hydrogen made from polyester and polyether. It is produced in thicknesses of from 5 to 25 microns (0.005 – 0.025 mm) and is highly elastic.

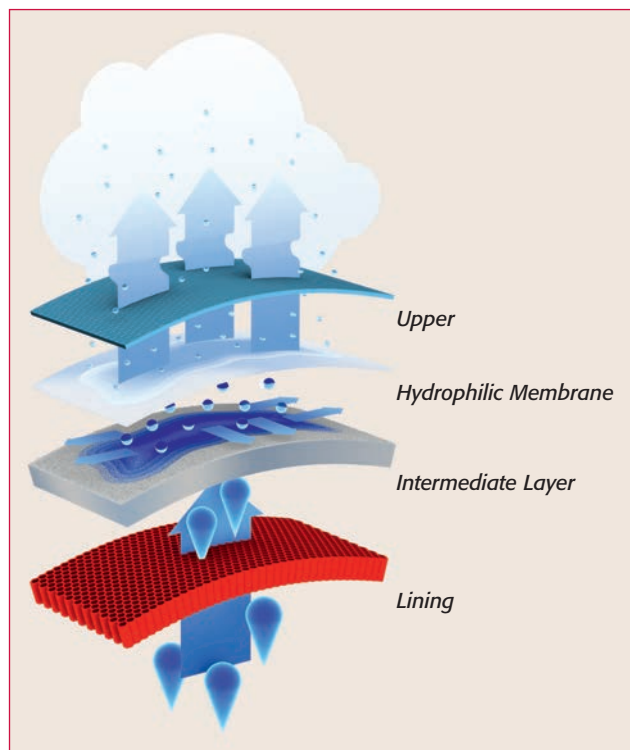
This membrane has been combined with a range of base materials to produce an innovative waterproof lining called Moisture-Tech which is available as a four layer iron-on laminate. The company says it has been able to maximise transmission of moisture from the foot to the membrane by the use of a special intermediate layer which provides perfect dynamic breathability, faster wicking and a dry climate for the foot.

This intermediate layer contains minute 3D air chambers which help to increase the rate of moisture transmission as physical activity increases as the increased roll of the foot creates a pumping effect. This will be of special benefit to athletes of many types as it increases ventilation of the shoe which in turn helps to reduce foot fatigue. Sympatex says that Moisture-Tech also overcomes the problem hitherto of taped seams reducing breathability by redistributing moisture away from these areas to the membrane where it can be transmitted from the shoe.

It does indeed appear to be extremely efficient according to test results obtained by Empa, the National Institute for Material Research and Technology in Switzerland. This involved measuring perspiration in the socks of various types of footwear when static and when moving. The less perspiration, the greater the comfort provided by the footwear. The test showed that the volume of perspiration left in shoes featuring Moisture-Tech averaged 1.98 grams while that for shoes using a top competitor technology came out at 3.54 grams or 78% more.

ECO-ETC.

When Jim and Donna Sheehan founded Sheehan Associates in 1992, they had each already accumulated over 25 years of textile expertise which they proceeded to use to



Moisture-Tech is a four layer iron-on laminate system for in-shoe moisture management. CREDIT: SYMPATEX TECHNOLOGIES

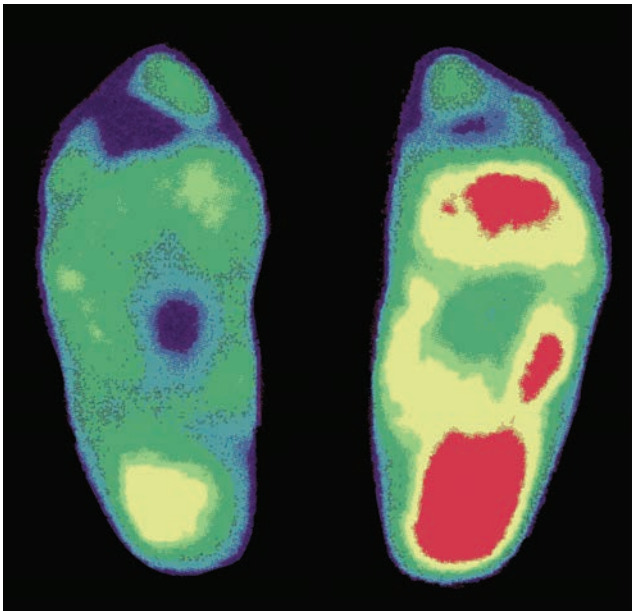
develop a range of performance textiles to specifically address the comfort factor in footwear.

The performance and athletic shoe market was booming but much of the technology had not kept pace with the demands placed on this type of footwear. Heat and moisture build-up in the shoe and the subsequent discomfort this brings was a problem and there was a demand for something that would either remove this moisture or avoid it in the first place. While most people took the former route, the Sheehans decided to research how this heat build-up might be reduced.

The foot is never static inside the shoe, it is always mobile, changing size and shape and reacting to outside movement. Pressure occurs in two main areas: the sole of the shoe in contact with the ground and the foot itself against the shoe lining. This pressure, constantly repeated, creates friction between the foot and the shoe creating heat and causing the foot to sweat more. The greater the foot action—as in running—the greater the friction and the more moisture produced.

The sources of the pressure could not be eliminated but could the resulting friction? The company spent two years trying different textiles and weaving techniques before finding an answer. The result was etc., a lining fabric that substantially reduces this friction. It is made from a high tenacity texturised polyester fibre produced using a special waffle-like knit pattern that is protected by trademark. This knit pattern is what makes etc. unique and is the key to how it works.

The friction between a socked foot and a fabric lining is measured by its COF (coefficient of friction). Tests showed that etc. fabric measured 0.1 or about as low as is possible between two fabrics. It also showed that a boot using etc. as a lining was anything up to 20°F (6.6°C) cooler than a boot



Thermal image after 15 minutes rapid walking – left foot with etc. fabric lining and right foot without. CREDIT: SHEEHAN ASSOCIATES

using a more conventional one. They also showed that this extra 20°F had created 25% more moisture thus clearly demonstrating the relationship between heat and moisture. The latter combination is also a recipe for blisters, calluses, fungus and malodour, so reducing it creates a healthier environment for the foot.

This unique fabric has provided the basis for all Sheehan etc. products ever since. It has also proved highly successful and has been applied to foot form covers and other products. In early 2007, the company launched eco-etc., an environmentally-friendly product with all the performance benefits of regular etc. but incorporating approximately 40% post-consumer waste. End-users not only wanted to feel more comfortable about their feet but also the world around them.

This trend has continued and now Sheehan has introduced the next generation eco-etc. which is made from 100% recycled PET fibres thus further reducing their carbon footprint and satisfying customer demands for the greenest products possible. In the drive to make footwear recyclable, renewable and sustainable while maintaining high levels of performance and integrity, the company intends to remain at the forefront through further research and development of its etc. lining products.

ULTIMATE SUEDE

Artificial alternatives to leather for footwear are nothing new and are extensively used by the industry for low cost footwear production, particularly fashion shoes. Only one however comes close to replicating natural leather in both appearance and physical properties; microfibre. Like leather, it has a fibrous structure except that its fibres are ultra fine. The finished material is therefore very light, has a soft, natural feel and is also highly porous offering excellent breathability and moisture dispersal.

A material is called a microfibre if it is lower than 0.1 denier determined by weighing 9000 metres of the yarn being used and an ultra-microfibre if less than 0.01 denier. It can be produced from nylon, polyester or nylon/polyester blends

and, generally speaking, the finer the fibre the better it is.

Although the term Sea-island is usually linked to cotton, it also describes the best method of producing ultra-microfibre. Nylon or polyester material (the island) is immersed in a copolymer of polyester (the sea). It is then treated with caustic soda, transforming the co-polyester into sodium salt which is washed away leaving only the inner fibres that make up the islands. If the initial denier of the islands in the sea is say 2 and the islands total 21, each island, once free of its sea, represents a microfibre of less than 0.1 denier.

Faytex Corp. uses microfibres to produce its Ultimate Suede, Lammy Suede and Milano linings which it has marketed under the Dri-Lex brand for the past five years. Of these, Ultimate Suede has consistently been the best seller despite being the most expensive. Made from 74% sea island polyester and 26% virgin polyester, it goes through a nine-step process that includes brushing, shearing, dissolving, dyeing, sanding, and heat-setting a number of times before final finishing in order to create its extremely soft hand. The latest twist is embossing.

“Embossing brings sophistication and style to these top-selling fabrics while also providing a supremely comfortable feel. Consumers will be attracted to the subtle patterns and soft feel. They’ll likely be surprised that this is a synthetic and not suede or leather,” says President and GM Cindy Stangl. The company has reported a very positive response to the new finishes from both existing customers and potential new ones.

While embossing is a well established finishing technique for both leather and synthetic materials, it is nevertheless a new, though logical, move for Faytex. As Cindy Stangl goes on to say, “We’re applying a proven process to a proven fabric and think the combination will give a fresh look to designers, a look that works equally well in different types of footwear from pumps and flats to boots and sandals.”

One other plus point is that depending on abrasion resistance requirements for a particular shoe, embossed Ultimate Suede can also be treated for added strength if needed. A further one is that the company claims that embossing adds only around \$ 0.15 to the cost of a pair of shoes. Lammy Suede (24% nylon and 76% polyester) and Milano (100% polyester) have a brushed finish which can also be embossed and have lower price points. 



Tan embossed Ultimate Suede. CREDIT: FAYTEX CORP.



CREDIT: LLOYD SHOE

Leather tests at a glance

Leather is infinitely variable depending on the type of hide, fibre structure, tannage and grain surface. It is therefore essential to fully understand any leather before using it in order to avoid any problems in either manufacture or in wear. Needless to say, there is a large number of tests that can be applied, some appropriate for many end uses and some more limited. There can also be more than one test method to determine the same basic property. It is therefore important to know which ones to use.

STRENGTH

Strength can be measured by either tear or tensile tests. Tear strength is good as it takes thickness into account and is therefore a useful guide to quality. In the Baumann test, a slot is cut in the sample piece which is then torn apart and the maximum load recorded. Satra's Star-burst method measures both tear and deformation properties by forcing a steel ball through an eight-spoke cut in the sample until it ruptures across its full width.

GRAIN CRACK

A lastometer test will predict the risk of grain crack at lasting. It is like the Star-burst test but with a smaller metal ball and no cuts in the sample. Pressure is applied until cracking of the grain occurs. The load and distension recorded gives a measure of the leather's resistance.

WATER RESISTANCE

Water-resistant footwear should have all components tested for absorption and leakage. The Maeser

test is a demanding dynamic method where the leather is flexed while in contact with water, reproducing the flexing strains of walking. The Bally pentrometer test is less demanding but can also measure water uptake.

WATER VAPOUR PERMEABILITY

Leather has the ability to transmit water vapour and so prevent build-up of perspiration next to the skin. While unfinished leather has high permeability, this can be substantially reduced by surface finishes depending on what they are made from and how much is applied. The Nice-Mitton test measures the weight gain of a desiccant within a container sealed using the leather under test and classifies it from very high to low permeability. As leather's perceived comfort is also influenced by its absorptive capacity, it is advisable to assess real comfort potential by using a combined permeability and absorption test.

COLOUR FASTNESS

This relates to whether there is any tendency to change colour and/or transfer colour from the leather to any material in contact with it. Surface colour fastness of unfinished leather is dependent on the type of dye used and the amount needed to achieve the required shade. Leather collagen has a limited number of sites to which dye can be chemically fixed so, generally, the deeper the shade the greater the tendency to shed colour. Water and perspiration fastness is assessed by placing wetted fabrics of different fibre composition in contact with the leather and recording the amount of colour that is transferred.

LIGHTFASTNESS

Leathers can fade or otherwise change colour on exposure to light. Lightfastness is determined by exposure to a xenon arc which reproduces the spectrum of natural daylight. Light fastness is also affected by the type of dye and the quantity that is present. Lower concentrations and pastel shades are particularly prone to fading. Pigment finishes have better lightfastness although this can be impaired if a dye with low lightfastness is added to aid colour matching or provide aesthetic effect.

FLEX RESISTANCE

Flexing in wear can damage the surface of finished leathers through cracking or crazing and, sometimes, delamination (blistering, flaking and peeling). The Satra vamp flex test accurately reproduces the flexing strains to which uppers are subjected in wear. The Bally flexometer uses an unusual flexing action which, while rather severe in some respects, remains effective in assessing possible finish failure.

WET AND DRY RUB FASTNESS

Shoe uppers are frequently subjected to mild abrasion in wear which may spoil the surface finish. The circular rub test reproduces this and determines both colour change and the amount of finish lost. The fastness of a finish is determined by the binder and amount of pigment used to produce it.

SCUFF RESISTANCE

Footwear intended for industrial and other rough usage is subject to a variety of different forms of abrasion requiring three separate tests. The Martindale abrasion test represents prolonged mild abrasion and is carried out under dry and wet conditions. The chisel scuff test is severe and represents accidental scuffing and snagging. The drum abrasion/snag test represents severe prolonged abrasion and falls between the other two in terms of severity.

FINISH ADHESION

A finish that becomes detached is more serious. The load needed to do this can be determined by bonding the finished surface to a rigid substrate and measuring the load needed peel it off. Results can however be misleading for lightly finished grain leathers where rub fastness and flex tests are usually sufficient for finish durability and adhesion. Heavier and stronger finish films do however need direct assessment of adhesion strength.

PATENT LEATHER

Patent leathers are prone to heat induced cracking during processing and delamination in wear at raw edges, scuff sites or flex cracking. A Zwick lastability test will reproduce the strains that occur during lasting and heat setting. Test pieces should contain a

row of stitch holes as cracking often occurs along lines of stitching in wear. A further test involves loosening the coating and, if possible, peeling it from the base leather. If the film is stronger than the adhesion there is a risk of finish peeling problems in wear.

OTHER TESTS

There are many others depending on leather type and end use including, for example, shape retention to measure the effectiveness of heat setting and adhesion properties for stuck-on production. Most footwear specifications now stipulate maximum levels of restricted chemicals with some, such as azo-dyes, part of environmental legislation. Hence there is also an increasing range of analytical tests which must be routinely carried out.

Pipiness is a coarse surface wrinkling that can appear during production. It is an inherent characteristic of some leathers which an inappropriate lining material and/or laminating method can aggravate so it is best measured beforehand. If the leather has such a loose fibre structure that it shows signs of piping at this stage, it is unlikely that it can be laminated to a lining without an unacceptable level of disfigurement. Suede and nubuck can be also problematic. Low substance suede splits are at high risk of tearing while coloured suedes and nubucks require a high dye loading that can cause staining of wearers' hose, feet and clothing.

POINTS TO WATCH

Because leather is a natural material, there are a number of factors to take into account when testing. Care must be taken with the number of samples and from where on the skin they are taken. Results from one batch of hides cannot necessarily be applied to others of ostensibly the same material. Tanners have quality systems restricting variability to tight limits but some variation in final product performance is inevitable. Moisture content affects physical properties so that if it is increased, grain crack resistance is also likely to increase. Pre-conditioning samples is therefore essential and test results without it, other than for on-going in-factory quality control, cannot be entirely trusted. 

Sheepskin boots are still the most iconic UGG product, but the brand is working hard to diversify its offering.

PHOTO CREDIT: UGG



Deckers aims to outgrow sheepskin boots

Owner of the UGG Australia footwear brand, Deckers Outdoor Corporation, has said that a combination of a warm winter and high sheepskin prices made 2012 “a challenging year”.

Deckers’ chief operating officer (COO), Zohar Ziv, recently told analysts that the winters in 2011 and 2012 were the warmest on record in key markets for the UGG brand, such as the north-east of the US. “We get a lot of sales from cold-climate areas such as the north-east,” he said. “But when it’s 18 degrees Celsius in New York City in December, people don’t want to wear or buy sheepskin boots so much.”

In addition to the warm weather, he said UGG had also experienced record high sheepskin prices in 2011 and 2012. “Prices for us went up by 40% in 2012,” Mr Ziv said, “and that was on top of a 30% rise in 2011.” However, he said that prices had come down by 11% at the start of 2013.

In spite of worries about weather and raw material prices, Mr Ziv says Deckers is positive about its potential for progress in 2013; its portfolio covers “all lifestyle segments”, he claims. UGG, with its famous sheepskin boots (although it is

There’s more to Deckers Outdoor Corporation than UGG, and there is more to UGG than the classic sheepskin boots synonymous with the name.

increasingly looking to diversify into other areas of what Mr Ziv calls “accessible luxury comfort”), a billion-dollar brand in its own right, accounts for 84% of revenues at the moment. It will be the end of February before the company’s next annual report comes out, but in the first nine months of 2012, net sales for all Deckers brands were \$797.1 million, compared to \$773.4 million for the first nine months of 2011.

Outdoor performance brand Teva is the next biggest, with a 9% share, followed by action sports brand Sanuk, with 6%. The other 1% is shared by a group that the COO calls the company’s “emerging brands”: Hoka running shoes, Mozo for people who work in the service industry, Tsubo for comfort and

Ahnu for trail, casual and yoga. "We look at these brands as our research and development," Mr Ziv continues, "and we think some of these emerging brands represent a really significant growth opportunity."

Expanding the range of products, particularly those that come under the UGG brand, is at the heart of Deckers' efforts to take this opportunity for growth. The "heritage" segment of the UGG portfolio, which is to say the core sheepskin boots, has a progressively declined, Mr Ziv explains, so more and more non-sheepskin items will take up space in UGG stores and on its e-commerce websites. "Luxury" boots in bovine leather, while not a principal part of UGG's offering, are proving successful, he says, and the company is seeking to attract more consumers to these products. It has reduced the price of them, from between \$250-\$300 per pair to \$200-\$250 per pair. The ones we have seen are handsome to look at but are made by outsource manufacturing partners in Vietnam. If they come with a price-tag for which you could, if you know where to look, buy artisan, handmade Italian boots, you have to wonder what proportion of the \$200 or \$250 Deckers wants consumers to pay just to have the UGG name on the boots (some UGG footwear in the luxury range is made in Italy, but comes under a super-luxury category heading and has a substantially higher price-point).

UGG Men is another example of product category expansion. It began about a year ago when Deckers signed up American football star Tom Brady to be the front man for the brand, or to be "UGG man", as Mr Ziv puts it. "We are very pleased with the progress we have made," the COO says of the strategy for extending the range, "and we will continue to expand beyond footwear into lifestyle. We believe we have the brand recognition to do so."

New UGG products for women will include handbag, apparel and accessory lines. But even within footwear, there will continue to be changes. Slippers, spring-summer items, including casual sneakers and colourful wedged sandals will all receive a push in 2013 having proved popular in 2012. The fledgling children's footwear business has also done well, with a little over 10% of all sales last year. "It should go to 15%," Zohar Ziv says, "and we will keep it there; we don't want to become a children's brand."

At present 380 independent footwear retailers around the world have an UGG shop-in-shop. Deckers describes this as a successful programme because it means the retailer has set



The UGG store in Richmond, near London, one of 77 own-brand retail outlets around the world.

PHOTO CREDIT: UGG

aside shelf-space completely dedicated to the UGG brand and is keen to keep them full and fresh all year round. On average, if these retailers used to stock 40 styles, the figure today is closer to 100, Mr Ziv says, leading to an uplift in sales of between 35% and 50%.

International expansion (which, in spite of UGG's connections to Australia, means outside the US) is another area that offers good scope for growth, he continues. It's a programme that began only six years ago (although the boots seem to have been ubiquitous for longer) and has now grown from being 10% of the brand's business to more than 30% now. Seven out of ten outlets overseas are owned by Deckers, with the other three being operated by its distribution partners. The company wants to continue expanding the model, with Latin America and eastern Europe among the areas it will focus on in the near future.



Sanuk products still display its quirky roots.

PHOTO CREDIT: SANUK



Teva is no longer all about sandals. It's developing year-round products such as the Raith Mid eVent, the Forge Pro Mid eVent and the Forge Pro Mid eVent Leather to attract young, active consumers.

PHOTO CREDIT: TEVA

"When you do this, you need to build the infrastructure," the COO says. "In Europe, we have pretty much done the build-out, but we still have some to do in Asia-Pacific. Now we are looking at extending our distribution in Latin America." Successes in Asia have mostly come from Japan and China, the second- and third-biggest economies in the world, after all. Deckers started distribution in Japan in 2009 and acquired its joint-venture partner in China in early 2012. In Japan, sales grew by approximately 80% in 2012, driven by expansion of wholesale and retail there and the launch of a dedicated Japanese e-commerce site. In China, sales rose by 70% in 2012, with nine new stores opening. An e-commerce site for this market is part of the plan for 2013.

Nevertheless, Japan and China still only occupy positions three and four on the table of best international markets for Deckers. Number one and number two are both in Europe, the UK and the Benelux countries respectively. This is in spite of the challenging economic and weather conditions mentioned above. The company took over direct management of its distribution network in both these European markets in 2011 and the in-house team has done a great job of "repositioning distribution", Mr Ziv insists, pointing out that the previous set-up was "too reliant on the core classic range" and was attempting to put them into too many shoe shops across northern Europe. "We've really cleaned up the distribution in the UK," he adds, "and we are very pleased with our position over there now. We are selectively opening own-brand retail stores in the UK now, and in France, and we will tackle the Benelux market next."

By the end of 2012, Deckers had 77 own-brand retail units around the world, divided between concept and outlet stores. The US, with 15 concept and 11 outlet stores, has the most, but China and Japan run it close with 18 and two and 12 and two respectively. There are nine concept stores and five outlet stores in different parts of Europe, and two and one in Canada. The group opened 30 of these retail operations in the course of 2012, including the first UGG For Men store on Madison

Avenue in New York City in June. By 2015, its plan is to increase the total number to 200.

An important point is that, once Deckers has an improved infrastructure in place in these areas, it will feel able to take some of its other brands, notably Teva and Tsubo, to new markets. Zohar Ziv says there is strong potential for brands such as Teva to grow. "We've changed it from a sandal-only and spring-summer-only brand to having year-round products, including closed footwear to make Teva attractive to younger, active consumers," he says. The group wants to continue diversifying Teva to include a wider range of technical and casual products; it wants Teva to become "a leader in the outdoor footwear market through innovation".

Sanuk, which means 'fun' in Thai, is a brand Deckers acquired in May 2011. It was founded in 1997 by entrepreneur Jeff Kelley, whose first footwear product was a sandal made from carpet. He grew Sanuk to make it well known for its original sandal designs and its irreverent marketing; at the time of the acquisition, Sanuk products were available in 1,700 retail outlets in 40 countries. At that time, according to Zohar Ziv, the brand was achieving annual sales worth around \$45 million, but he says this has doubled in less than two years under Deckers' ownership.

Sanuk, too, will become an all-year-round footwear brand as part of the group's growth plans and will become more widely available in international markets. Mr Ziv explains that there are already more than 50 licensed-partner-run stores in Asia, 35 in Taiwan alone, but he says Deckers believes Sanuk products, ranging from the casual Sidewalk Surfer range to fleece-lined winter boots, have "great appeal". He adds that own-brand Sanuk stores will open in 2013 and that Deckers will continue to build brand awareness.

He accepts that Deckers will continue to be best known for UGG, but points out that the group's six other lifestyle footwear brands are "non-competing" with "meaningful growth opportunities", with only a few of these involving sheepskin. 



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Former nurse Julie Lopez found it impossible to buy shoes that were elegant and comfortable enough for her to wear to her daughter's wedding in 2010, so she gave up her job and launched her own footwear brand.

PHOTO CREDIT: JULIE LOPEZ SHOES

Heels without pain

Julie Lopez traces a bunion on her foot to the extensive time she spent playing basketball as a teenager. Decades of nursing, notorious for keeping people on their feet for long periods of time, did little to help and by 2010, when her daughter celebrated her wedding, Ms Lopez struggled to find a pair of shoes that were suitably stylish and still comfortable enough to wear.

Such was her indignation that she gave up nursing and spent the next two years researching and learning about shoes. By 2012, she decided she was far from alone in desiring comfort as well as elegance in shoes and that the time was right to launch her own brand, Julie Lopez Shoes, incorporating special, patent-pending comfort technology. Her idea was to make heels that women, even those with foot problems, could wear for extended periods of time. "I know a lot of women suffer from idiosyncrasies with their feet," she explains. "I've seen research that claims that staggering numbers of women in the US alone have bunions, somewhere between 30% and 50% of all the women in the country. For some of us, the body make-up can lead toward a bunion because we naturally pronate our feet in a certain way, and then we can exacerbate that by putting our feet into certain types of shoes."

It was immediately clear to her that, in addition to her

Former nurse Julie Lopez had such a struggle finding shoes she could wear to her daughter's wedding that she gave up her job and devoted herself to sourcing stylish but comfortable high-heeled shoes that she has now launched under her own brand name.

comfort technology ideas (more on which later), the shoes would need to be manufactured with the finest quality and craftsmanship available. This meant turning to Italy, with the first four styles becoming available for a "soft launch" of the brand in 2012. Her vision of "beautiful heels without the pain" had become a reality.

Ms Lopez confirms: "I've always loved heels. I'd say they just allow me to feel more feminine, more womanly. When you have heels on, you hold your body differently, in a more attractive position; you move differently. I can be a tomboy with the rest

PUTTING THE HEELS THROUGH THEIR PACES

I'm sure plenty of women will, at some stage in their lives, have been in so much pain in their high heels that taking them off and walking through dirty, potentially glass-strewn streets has either a) been done, or b) looked like an attractive option. Men will never understand: "Why go through that amount of pain?" – but what would they know.

As women get older, however, the pain/aesthetic threshold diminishes, and the idea of suffering for one's art (vanity?) seems less appealing. The Julie Lopez heels were constructed to provide an answer by offering both height and comfort. The side vents let the shoes 'give', which prevents rubbing on the upper foot, and the cushioning around the sole means they ease pressure on the ball. The angle of the instep also adds to the comfort – many traditional pumps have such a steep gradient that the body's weight is concentrated on a small area of the ball, giving meaning to the maxim 'beauty equals pain'. But thankfully, with the Lopez shoes, the gentler slope meant my weight was distributed more evenly across the ball of the foot so I didn't feel like I was walking on tip-toes.

After putting the shoes through their paces around the city – and Liverpool has its fair share of hills and cobbles – the pavements were no longer my enemy. I was happy to stand for long periods, and it was refreshing to wake up afterwards without the familiar aches. The shoes could be easily worn every day – perfect for the woman who's not ready to succumb to house slippers quite yet...



The Layla style from the Julie Lopez range.

PHOTO CREDIT: JULIE LOPEZ SHOES

of them, but I know that if I wear tennis shoes to walk around the park, I'm inclined to be more lazy in my gait. Whereas, if I have a pair of heels on, even with jeans, I feel more confident, more in control, and that's an attractive feature in itself."

Academic support

Her opinion appears to have the support of an academic team at the University of Portsmouth in the south of England. In a study published at the end of 2012, researchers at the university concluded that high-heeled shoes help a woman look attractive because of the effect they have on the way her whole body moves.

Research involved asking observers (men and women) to gauge the attractiveness of a range of women from their walk. The women were filmed wearing shoes with a six-centimetre heel and, at different times, flat shoes. The technology used in the study meant the observers watched only a pattern of lights.

Ten women featured in the study; all ten were judged to look more attractive and more feminine when wearing heels. The team from the University of Portsmouth concluded that women wearing heels were more likely to attract admiring glances because of the way their hips, shoulders, legs, knees and feet move as a result of wearing the shoes. Researchers found that, on average, the women walked more quickly when wearing heels, increasing the number of strides per minute from 106 to 110 steps. However, their stride shortened with high-heeled shoes on their feet, from 1.24 metres in length to 1.2 metres. The numbers, it seems, translate into added glamour and desirability.

No pain, just gain

An obvious conclusion to draw from this is that, even if high-heeled shoes are uncomfortable to wear, they are worth putting up with. But Julie Lopez's contention is that women should not have to put up with the discomfort or with the harm uncomfortable footwear can cause. So as well as choosing her manufacturing partners carefully to make sure the shoes that bear her name are a high quality product, well made from carefully chosen leather from Italian tanneries, she has devoted a lot of thinking time to making them comfortable.

With the patents still pending, there are things she cannot say about her North Carolina-based brand's proprietary comfort technology, but she will confirm that the ideas are mostly concentrated in the forefoot area of the shoe to alleviate pressure there and help decrease painful joint inflammation. They include three millimetres of padding in the forefoot region for shock absorption. There is also a system for "manipulating" the leather in strategic parts of the upper by adding Lycra to the backing material and by inserting vents, which work like a gusset in sewn apparel, the company founder explains, giving a small amount of stretch exactly where it's needed.

The location of seams in the upper, especially in the vamp, is something else she has paid close attention to, with the aim of avoiding friction as much as possible. For the same reason, the toe-box is slightly wider than usual to allow the foot to remain in a more natural position, minimising stress and



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Quality counts. Ms Lopez searched for, and found, a manufacturing partner in Italy who could turn her vision into real shoes. PHOTO CREDIT: JULIE LOPEZ SHOES

decreasing pain. A further detail is non-slip padding on the sole of the shoe for better traction on slippery surfaces. "I've been a stickler for attention to detail," Ms Lopez says. "I know the things that affect my feet and I have set out to avoid them."

Artisan appeal

She explains that one of her biggest challenges was to reach a level of understanding with the artisan footwear manufacturers in Italy who are now working on Julie Lopez shoes. "Beauty is all for them," she says, not without admiration. "I'm not sure comfort was in their vocabulary." But she says her relationship with her manufacturing partners is "working beautifully" now, helped by the fact that the owner of the factory in Italy was one person who did understand why Ms Lopez's bunion affects her views on shoes so deeply; he has a bunion too. She wanted to go to Italy and put herself out to make the relationship work because she wanted those levels of craftsmanship to go into the shoes and because she knew Italy's gifted artisans were the right people to entrust with the task of turning her vision into real shoes that real women can wear the vision she had in her mind.

Near the end of 2012, Ms Lopez began to build a team back in the US to launch the brand fully and bring a full-scale line of shoes to the market. Additional styles, colourways and designs came out at the start of 2013 and the company announced that it will extend the line to flats and kitten heels, as well as heels up to ten centimetres in height. There will even be an official global launch party, at the Platform event in Las Vegas in August, part of the Magic exhibition.

"This is all about trying to make sure women can put the shoes on," Julie Lopez says. "It's the coolest thing to have women say they haven't dared to put on heels in years, sometimes ten years, but that now they have heels they can wear. And I want women to know that every one of our shoes will be comfortable. No woman will have to wonder if a shoe she likes is wearable. She will know that if she buys Julie Lopez, we have paid all the necessary attention to detail to make it comfortable for her. She will be able to look at the shoe and base her decision to buy it on what it looks like on her foot and how much she likes it. Just like any woman buying any shoe." 🌀

Away from the glitz and glamour of the high-profile commercial battles between big-name sports shoe brands, a much quieter footwear revolution has been taking place amidst the mud and rocks in the United Kingdom where fell runners run free.

True grit

Simon Roberts



Not for the faint-hearted. Fell runner Peter Agnew picks his way across a tricky track in the Scottish Highlands.

PHOTO CREDIT: GDSALISTAIR TYE

Fell running in the UK is not a glamorous sport. Far removed from the commercial merry-go-round of a big city marathon, it tends to be dominated by wiry middle-aged men shambling around in string vests and indecently tight 1970s-style shorts.

It's hard to retain even a semblance of glamour when cresting the top of a Welsh mountain in gale-force winds and driving sleet, or surging waist-deep through a Peak District bog. It is a sport that prides itself on its purity and freedom from commercial influences. Indeed, an important part of the sport's historical narrative emphasises precisely this tradition of suffering without specialist equipment. It typically revolves around the exploits of the sport's past legends, performing almost unbelievable feats of endurance in a pair of hobnailed boots sustained by jam sandwiches and the odd sip from a mountain stream.

Off-road revolution

Spread the lens a little further afield, however, away from the grim moors of northern England and the windswept mountains of the Celtic nations, and it becomes clear that a revolution in off-road running equipment has taken place. A new range of events – catering to a new kind of runner and requiring a more sophisticated approach to equipment – has

emerged. Catch-all descriptors for such events are elusive, but they are often called trail races, and are usually associated with the drier, larger, more spectacular mountain scenery of the Alps, Pyrenees and North America.

And, perhaps because of this global focus, even the traditional world of British fell running has opened up to a range of new footwear in recent years. It's been a quiet revolution, but a significant one.

One-man band

The revolution was gradual at first. The Lake District shepherds who surged up the hills in leather boots attracted wider attention from city dwellers keen to match their exploits, but those runners attracted to the challenges of running up mountains soon realised that something lighter and more specifically suited to steep slopes might help them run faster and in greater comfort. Enter Norman Walsh of Bolton, England (also the birthplace of Reebok), who designed the first custom-made fell running shoe in 1961 – specifically tweaked for the muddy, heather-clad slopes of the British hills.

Perhaps surprisingly, they found an international market. Scandinavians, for example, found them perfectly suited to their chosen sport of orienteering: the grip and sensitivity proving beneficial in the wet birch woods and difficult Nordic terrain.

More recently they have become popular in the US and Australia and are, apparently, something of a fashion icon in Japan.

Walsh's shoes dominated the off-road running market for decades and their image perfectly chimed with that of the sport of fell running. Rather dour, determinedly functional, über-traditional: the no-frills design reflected their origins in the dark Pennine hills.

There was no going back to hobnailed boots or plimsolls. Instead, the bespoke fell running shoe revolved around an emphasis on grip and traction. They are also much lower in profile than a typical road running shoe, with very little cushioning and a tight-fitting upper. The low-profile feels disconcerting to road runners at first, as they are used to more support, but it actually reduces the likelihood of a twisted or sprained ankle.

The principles established by Walsh remain with us, but even in the staid world of fell running their products were beginning to look a little tired by the turn of the new millennium.

In with the new

Inov-8, another company born in the hills of northern England, exploited the rather obvious gap in the market by introducing a range of sleek, even stylish, off-road running shoes. Initially going for the traditional Walsh market, its Mudroc and Mudclaw models introduced ever more aggressive soles, with deep spikes allowing for fast downhill plunges. As most British fell races are won on the descents, they quickly gathered an enthusiastic following.

New manufacturing techniques were introduced by the company, with technical-sounding trademarks attempting to encapsulate the difference between its products and those that had gone before. The 'Metashank' midsole, for example, used on many of its more aggressive models, is supposed to align behind the metatarsals to give greater forefoot flexibility. What this means in practice is that the runner has a better level of control when contouring steep hillsides.

As a result, the majority of fell runners in the UK have switched to Inov-8 in recent years. Simon Edwards, a leading Welsh fell runner, is typical: "I used to swear by Walsh shoes. I believed them to be the best fell shoe by far. However, during a race around five years ago I had an epiphany. I was attempting, and failing, to navigate steep, wet rock. The runners I was with were struggling but I was suffering by far the worst. After the race I saw them all wearing Inov-8 shoes.

"I immediately swapped and never looked back. In hindsight I reckon the Walsh format is unsuitable for "heavier" runners –

I'm 73kg, for example. They're too narrow which causes stability issues; and the trademark pyramid-style studs offer a very low surface area making them poor for running on expanses of flat rock. In contrast Inov-8 offered, and more so now, a range of shoes for differing terrains, runners' weights and so on. This level of customisation and choice has helped a great many runners - me included."

Alpine air

The company quickly diversified its output, and, like Walsh, began to reach beyond the relatively limited world of British fell running to appeal to an international audience of off-road runners. A range of trail shoes was introduced, with more cushioning for the feet, better suited to the drier, rockier tracks that typify Alpine racing. Races in the Alps also tend to be uphill only, so there is little point in investing in highly aggressive uncushioned shoes like the Mudclaw. Instead, models like the Roclite and more recent Terraflly gained an international following.

The Terraflly, in particular, is a more versatile shoe, which works very well on the sorts of trail running common in parts of the Alps and North America. While you wouldn't want to be careering down a muddy hill in the Lake District in them, they are superbly adapted to a mix of road, trail and gravel.

Inov-8 markets the Terraflly as a 'hybrid' shoe, a newish concept encompassing training and events that use a mixture of tarmac roads and trail. Indeed, Inov-8 has recently launched a range of road shoes that takes a similarly radical approach to conventional thinking. These were paralleled by the introduction of the distinctive Bare Grip 200, designed for the hills as an almost skeletal, minimalist shoe that taps into the 'barefoot running' zeitgeist.

The barefoot running ethos expounded by Inov-8 recently reached a much wider audience with the publication of Christopher McDougall's *Born to Run* – which outlines the performances of Mexico's Tarahumara tribe and argues that western runners' dependence on spongy, cushioned footwear makes them more, not less, prone to injury. Inov-8's designs typically have no midsole, which it claims means energy is transferred directly through the shoe.

The appeal of lightness

These shoes are also, of course, very light. Indeed, the ultra-lite X-Talon 190 (as in 190 grammes) is designed for speed and so inevitably makes some trade-offs with durability. But this extreme lightness is highly appealing to fell runners, for whom every gram matters when climbing steep hills.



Ultralite X-Talon shoes from Inov-8 let runners feel every contour of the terrain.

PHOTO CREDIT: INOV-8



Inov-8 has won a strong following among fell runners after years of dominance by specialty footwear brand Walsh. Some durability issues have come to light.

PHOTO CREDIT: ALISTAIR TYE

Fell runner and race organiser Peter Agnew is typical of many in his devotion to this particular model of shoe, which has gained a remarkably loyal following given its relatively recent launch: "I am now on my third pair of X-Talons and I am not minded to buy anything else. In fact, when I did, purchasing a pair of Mudroc 270s because I was seduced by the chunky sole, I found them floppy - akin to strapping a Cornish pasty [pie] to my feet. The Mudrocs were also terrible when traversing, sliding around the foot, even when tightened.

"I love the fact that the X-Talons let you feel each rugosity [ridge or crease], even when descending at speed. This isn't uncomfortable, as it just amplifies the sense of security you need to experience when flying downhill. Since there is so little to the shoe, there is very little to rub and I can categorically say that I have never had a blister when wearing them. A good fell shoe should feel the same when dry or saturated and this is the case with the X-Talons, which shed water instantly."

Less successful are the boot versions of these very light shoes. They give some ankle protection, but the lightness versus durability trade-off is somewhat less successful. A few days in the Scottish Highlands earlier this year, for instance, saw mine develop large holes on both insteps.

Price to pay

These trade-offs are an inevitable byproduct of this sort of innovation, and are well illustrated by the differences between Inov-8's Mudclaws and X-Talons. The Mudclaws have a highly aggressive sole, with long studs that provide tremendous stability and confidence and are perfectly suited to a steep British fell race. But the price to be paid for this is increased

weight. The X-Talons are far lighter, but the short studs can make descending difficult in wet and muddy conditions.

Jez Brown is a fell runner who regularly wins races in Wales and north-west England. He has recently switched from Walsh, to adidas Swoop, to Inov-8, and has found Mudclaws most suitable to his requirements: "I'm one of those 'careful with money' people and had been put off by the price of Inov-8s, but after sending back a pair of Walsh trail shoes after only three months' use due to a hole developing in the toe area, then the same happening with a pair of adidas fell shoes, I took the plunge and got some Mudclaws. I must admit, I can't believe I waited three years and I wish I had tried them sooner. I found within a few days that they provided a really comfortable fit and, even though they're heavier than some of the company's other products, I reckon they are much lighter than other fell shoes I have worn."

There are some dissenting voices among the off-road running community. Significant numbers remain loyal to Walsh and other brands, while several runners have specific criticisms of the otherwise lauded Inov-8 products.

Take Neil Parry, a regular race winner with two decades of experience, for instance: "I think Inov-8 overtook Walsh due to the technological advances in the shoes and the various models for various types of running. From my experience of Inov-8 I have found that in general they are good. They have a good fit and feel comfortable. I like the fact that you can go on the website and pick the shoes specifically for the terrain and type of running you are looking to do, but I've been disappointed with my latest pair of Mudclaws. The heel of one of the shoes has fallen apart and the uppers have come away from the soles, and I know that others have had similar problems."

Imelda Marcos syndrome

As a consequence of all this innovation, many off-road runners now have Imelda Marcos syndrome: a pair of shoes for every possible eventuality. This, as much as anything, illustrates the success of Inov-8. They have persuaded fell runners to switch from the traditional offering, not through marketing but by the real advantages tailored footwear can offer. The races may still retain their determinedly un-commercial air, they may still cost £3 to enter with a cake and pint of ale included in the price, but the days of an old pair of flapping plimsolls, or even one all-purpose pair of Walsh shoes, have gone.

At a recent short fell race in north-east Wales, it was possible to make an assessment of the shoe choices. Most common, by some margin, were Inov-8 X-Talons, an illustration that runners generally opt for lightness over durability. This model was followed by its Mudclaw, Mudroc and Bare-grip models. Then came Walsh, followed by adidas Swoop, and a few mavericks in Salomon shoes, or Running Bear products (a small Cheshire-based company). At a longer race, the 20-kilometre Foel Fras race in Snowdonia, which takes in four peaks and 1,500 metres of climbing, more people had opted for the durable Walsh footwear, or Mudclaws, but there were still significant numbers in ultra-light designs. That encapsulates the current approach: it is very hard to move from light to heavy no matter what the circumstances. 🌀

Simon Roberts is a journalist and academic, and also Welsh fell running champion in the veteran category for 2011.

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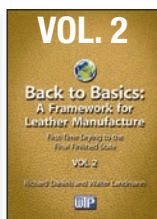
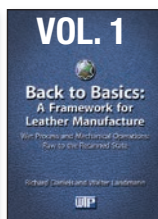
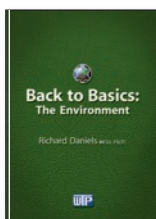
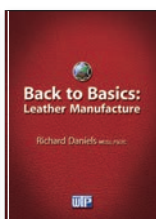


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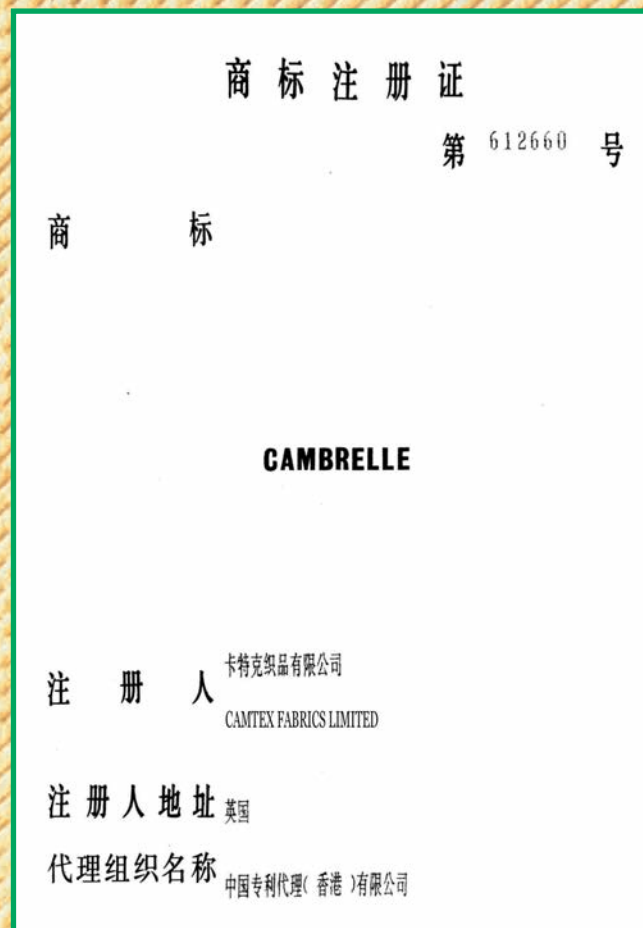
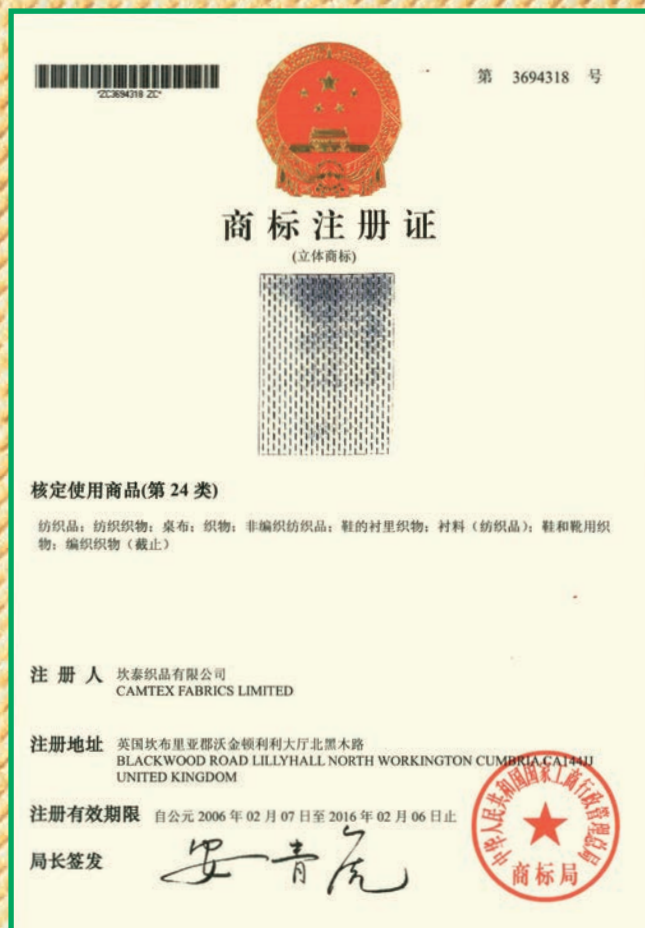
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