



FASHION MEETS PERFORMANCE

What are US outdoor retailers buying in the way of knitted apparel?
Kathlyn Swantko visits the OR show in Salt Lake City to find out.

More than 14,000 attendees put on their most comfortable walking shoes to peruse the vast halls of Salt Lake City's Salt Palace, as the 2006 Outdoor Retailer Winter Market had much to offer those interested in winter performance apparel and gear. The show, which was held January 28 - 31st, was the largest Winter Market in OR's history, featuring 754 exhibiting companies, including more than 800 brands, and featuring about 20 new exhibitors compared to last year's show.

"The breadth and reach of the outdoor community is growing," said Peter Devin, group show director for OR. "Winter Market provides the outdoor marketplace and the

world's retailers and distribution channels the season's first comprehensive opportunity to see entire fall, winter, and holiday 2006 assortments.....all under one roof."

Attendees noted growing trends towards comfort apparel, women-specific products, alpine mountaineering gear, trail running products, wellness goods, and eco-sustainable products.

Some of the trends that were apparent in knitted apparel included new fleece innovations, a resurgence of sweater looks, fabrics and yarns that multi-task, the expansion of performance into more fashionable lifestyle clothing, along with the on-going attention toward

eco-friendly fabrics.

Sweater looks were once again brought to the forefront, and offered a great example of fusing the outdoor and fashion industries together. Sweaters were important enough to demand an entire segment in OR's featured collections at its 2nd Annual OR Winter Market Fashion Show.

The new fleece look was a particularly important trend evident in knitwear. The use of new fibres and blended yarns, anti-static treatments, new finishes, along different knitted constructions have been adopted to provide an innovative fashion look to this ageless industry standard. Even sweater looks are influencing fleece

The new 'Hoodie Wrap' from Contourwear uses Unifi's Sultra yarn knitted by Rentex



constructions, such as those from Concept III, a New Jersey-based textile resource and garment production service. Some of its new fleece developments borrowed sweater looks, and incorporated sweater-like textures into fleece constructions. Using a "body-mapping" approach in the knitting process of the fleece fabrics provides for very interesting finished garments.

Like seamless knitting, "body-mapping" uses a jacquard knitting process to engineer new textures and patterns for the fleece fabric, or to a specific area of the finished garment.

Here, *Knitting International* takes a look at these and other new trends and products at the show targeted towards knitted fabric applications for the outdoor market.

Fleece in the spotlight

Seattle, Washington-based Kavu produces men's and women's apparel using a variety of comfortable, durable, and colourful fabrics in designs that take people through all the adventures of daily life.

At ORWM, Kavu featured its 'Glacier Fleece' women's jackets and vests. The Glacier fleece is 100% sherpa polyester cut pile fleece bonded to a velour polyester fleece on the inside. The garments offer warmth, durability, and comfort in a fashionable garment. The key point that is catching the retailers' eyes is the subtle colour blocking which makes the items stand apart from other products in the market.

"A key detail for our development was to give the Glacier fleece a certain worn-in look through a new washing treatment, explained Barry Barr, president of the company. "We wanted it to look broken-in and worn, but not used. So we put two and a half hours of post-washing and enzyming to make these items look like they have been on the back deck of a crab boat in the Bering Sea for 5 years."

Meanwhile, Outlast Technologies is now applying its temperature-regulating technology to rayon (viscose)/cotton knits. This is currently being produced by Fountain Set Ltd., Hong Kong. The fibre was developed in Europe by the European Outlast group, through Kelheim Fibres in Germany.

"We have a lot of knitters that are just starting to use viscose yarns with Outlast," explained Janie Lowe, product development manager for Outlast. "We



Left and below: Kavu 'Glacier fleece' cut pile fleece bonded to velour inside.

You can actually put your hand inside of the sock and feel the coolness that the technology provides. So, you have the technology where you want it, right next to the skin."

Stretch fabrics

The first DuPont polymer derived from a biological source, its new Sorona combines the best properties of nylon ? exceptional softness and drape ? with the easy care of a polyester. It is fade resistant in the wash, stain resistant, UV and chlorine resistant, and it has comfort stretch. Fully drawn flat yarns made with Sorona with approximately 120% strain will have 100% recovery. In textured yarns, Sorona fibres offer 145% stretch with 100% recovery.

Dawson Winch, global product manager for Sorona, said, "It is beautiful for almost any application. In intimate apparel it provides softness, but is also easy care. In swimwear, it's fade resistant from UV and chlorine. In activewear, the fibre can be made for wicking with channels. The channels in Sorona stay more clearly defined than they do in commercial polyester, so it transports moisture away from the skin. It dyes at the boiling point of water. So unlike polyester, it doesn't require heat carriers or pressure to dye. And, it holds very deep rich colours."

Greensboro yarn processor Unifi used the OR Show to showcase its new 'aio' (all-in-one) performance yarn. Unifi claims this

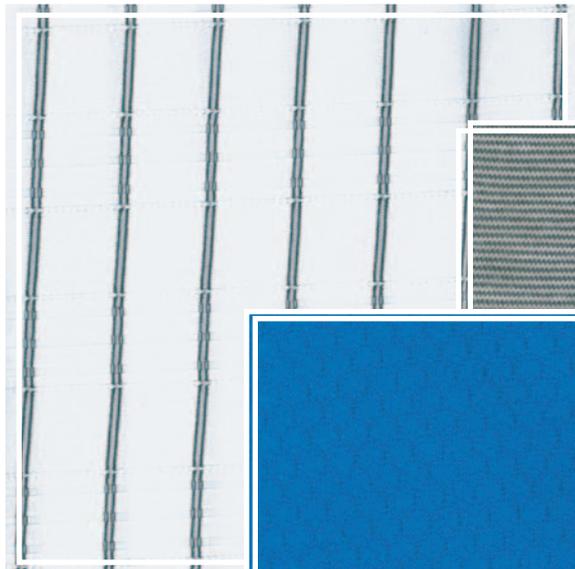
hope that the viscose will open up all kinds of opportunities in base layer, everyday wear, lifestyle clothing. I think that viscose fibre is going to be very important in sweaters. It can be blended with all types of yarn: wool, cashmere, cotton, and recycled cottons."

This product has been in the development stages for about a year. But, it's completely commercial now, and the yarn spinning is being done around the world. Its main partners are in Taiwan, and it also has a partner here in the U.S.

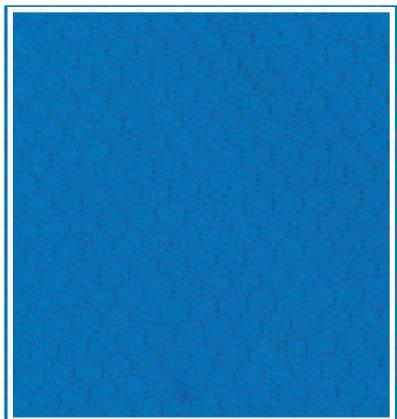
Another area where the viscose/Outlast is expected to do well is in socks ? for dress and casual socks, as well as outdoor socks. According to Lowe, with viscose the requirement of Outlast that needs to be in the fibre for function is 30%, compared to the existing application of acrylic, in which the minimum requirement is 40%. She added "The viscose has a bigger punch than the acrylic. It has 4 to 5 times the ability to absorb, store, and release energy as heat, compared to acrylic. With our lower requirement, it's a better value overall."

Outlast also has a new way of applying its technology to socks, using an infusion technique. After the sock have been constructed, it is turned inside out, and the Outlast technology is applied to the inside of the sock. Lowe stated, "This is done in the last step, so the sock can be made of anything.





Above: Tactel fabric from Exportex, S.A. Mexico



Left & above: Sorona-based fabrics knitted by Favis Co., Ltd. Korea

yarn utilises the multiple functions of its performance yarns, Sorbtek, Mynx UV, Reflexx, and A.M.Y., into one single product. The fibre blend is said to improve comfort and fit, and it can provide technologies that can add moisture management, antimicrobial protection, and UV protection into garments and socks.

Sueded stretch

Rentex is a completely vertical knitting mill and dye house is based in Iberville, Quebec, Canada, just outside of Montreal. The dye house is located in Prescott, Ontario. The company produces about 80% warp knits, and 20% circular knits.

At OR, Rentex featured a new fabric development, which is made from a blend of 84% Unifi's Sultrapoly/16% spandex, and then it is sueded. David Turk of Rentex, who developed the technology and brought it to Rentex. He stated, "When I joined Rentex and saw all of the surface finishing that they were capable of doing on elastomeric products, I knew that this was going to be a natural for them."

Turk explained, "The fabric can be worn with either the soft and comfortable sueded Sultra side against the skin with the spandex side on the outside; or for a more aesthetic look, you could put the sueded side on the outside. The important thing from a performance standpoint is that it has great wicking and great moisture control.

Turk added, "Rentex can also make the fabric using Unifi's Reflexx yarn, for those companies that don't need the compression of a spandex yarn, and want a less expensive fabric. We have received a great reaction from the cycling market

and the yoga market. And, it's already been picked up by Pyrana and Contourwear."

Mexico City company Exportex is a circular knitter and first time exhibitor at the Outdoor Retailer Show. A recent partnership with Deer Creek Fabrics, an established converter based in Stamford, Connecticut, has brought the two companies together. The Exportex line of fabric was featured along with the Deer Creek fabrics in the Deer Creek booth.

The relationship is opening up many new global opportunities for both Deer Creek and Exportex and brings together the traditional performance, safety/protective, and military capabilities of Deer Creek Fabrics, combined with the novelty performance capabilities of Exportex. Because of Exportex's line of high-end creative performance fabrics, Steve Lucier, president of Deer Creek Fabrics, jokingly refers to Exportex as "the Italian mill located in Mexico that produces the sexy line!"

Now in its third generation, the 41-year-old family-own business has a substantial knitting operation with 100 circular machines, including both Vanguard and Mayer & Cie equipment. A finishing plant that was added in 1985, is capable of producing around 250 tons of fabric per month. Recently, the company also added some collar machines.

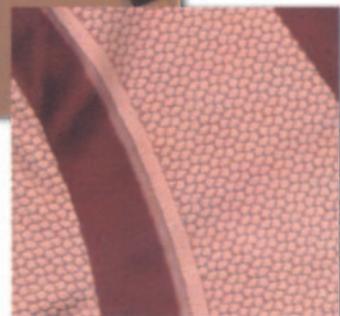
Alejandro Toussier, the grandson of the original owner, who is now involved in product development, explained, "We have a variety of knitting machines, so we

can do pretty much any knit. We are exclusively circular knits, and we are working with high-end fibres. We have gone through the learning curve over the years on working with a variety of difficult yarns."

Toussier said that the company has two divisions ? an industrial division, which caters to the apparel interlining business, and some service materials for automotive. On the apparel side, Exportex has its volume market, servicing the local Mexican market, and its high-end market, which services some customers in the European market.

At OR the company showed an exciting line of novelty performance fabrics, which generated a great deal of excitement from many prominent US performance apparel manufacturers, including micro-denier poly with Lycra, Tactel nylons with Lycra, viscose, poly/viscose, 100% nylon, Tactel nylon/poly blends, and polypropylenes. All of the fibres can also be combined with Lycra.

Toussier noted, "We have developed Tactel nylon and Lycra, in 200 gsm (grams per square meter), 235gsm, and in 255 gsm, which is a much tighter knit. It feels very much like a compression fabric. We can make meshes, which are primarily micro-denier poly meshes with and without Lycra, jerseys, interlocks, piques, and plaited fabrics, incorporating micro-denier poly on one side, and a Tactel nylon/Lycra on the other side. Right now, we're working with performance, but we want to meld it into the fashion market as well." **KI**



Engineered fleece from Concept III