CATCH ME IF YOU CAN
The blending of advancements in fabric and fiber technology into garment design is giving athletes the “bionic” edge.

NOW YOU SEAM THEM, NOW YOU DON’T
The seamless sensation is spreading throughout the industry like wildfire and is revolutionizing the fit and feel of apparel.

TELLING THE STORY
The industry says it places a high priority on fabric education for store staff and consumers, but is the system working?

FORMING A NEW BOND
Gear and apparel manufacturers are bonding with adhesive film and welded seam technology.

CARE & FEEDING OF SYNTHETIC INSULATIONS
A practical reference guide with tips on how to care for synthetic garments and gear.

ON THE HORIZON
Our look at trends in textiles that you may see down the pike.
fabric trends

welcome

The GearTrends team trusts you will enjoy FabricTrends, our first supplement designed to serve the information and communication needs of fabric, insulation and notions suppliers. FabricTrends was produced in partnership with FabricLink.com, an online educational resource and communication link developed for the textile/apparel/retail industry and its consumers.

In addition to co-branding, information support and the co-development of special fabric information and trends pages in GearTrends’ magazines, the partnership between GearTrends and FabricLink.com establishes programs to provide benefits for suppliers who participate as members and advertisers in both GearTrends.com and FabricLink.com.

To that end, it’s ideal: SNEWS® and GearTrends® are considered the best sources of trade news and information for the outdoor and fitness industries, and FabricLink.com has established itself as the leading source of information specific to fabrics, mills, manufacturers and fiber producers—a key resource for both industries.

Through our partnership, all manufacturers, suppliers, retailers and consumers of the outdoor, adventure and fitness industries now have unique access to the most current product knowledge and trends information available.

Thank you for reading, for your feedback, and for your support of our efforts to serve the industry.

Michael Hodgson
Co-Publisher, GearTrends® and SNEWS®
Kathlyn Swantko
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Imagine a garment that fits well, is comfortable—and has no seams.

Although seamless knitting has been widely used for intimate apparel since 1997, the technology is beginning to garner more widespread attention in other types of apparel for the outdoor and fitness markets.

**HOW IT WORKS**

Seamless knitting is done on cutting-edge Santoni or Sangiacomo (OK, OK, sounds like mob names plucked from the "The Sopranos") circular knitting machines. These machines can essentially produce complete garments with minimal finishing steps.

“Seamless knitting is a weft knitting technology, which produces finished or semi-finished garments on body-sized circular knitting machines, with the same features as pantyhose and sock machines,” said Paul Yang, co-owner of PJY Inc./Intimo Industries, a Vernon, Calif.-based, seamless knitter. “They create horizontal finished edges with no side seams.”

Initially, most seamless knits were produced in the eastern United States, Israel and the Far East. However, Los Angeles is fast becoming the center for seamless manufacturing in the United States. Just four years ago, there were no seamless knitting machines in Los Angeles. Today, some estimate there are as many as 200 machines.

Seamless knitting machines can virtually transform yarn into complete garments, and minimize the traditional labor-intensive steps of cutting and sewing. Colored patterns and logos can also be knitted right into the garment. The fabric structure, pattern constructions, measurements, fiber specifications and brand name logos can be pre-programmed into the machines.

Garments of any size can also be knitted with elastic waistbands or lace effects, and can be mass-produced into a one-piece garment, with minimal sewing to finish the garment.

**THE BENEFITS**

There are some obvious, and not so obvious, advantages of seamless garments over traditionally knit ones.

“The obvious advantage is that the lack of seams provides for improved comfort as the body moves,” said Brian Enge, vice president and general manager for Hind (a division of Saucony). “The second advantage is the ability to combine textures and levels of compression in ways that haven’t been done in the past. To me, the best advantage is that designs aren’t limited by seams.”

John Neman, president of Selectra Industries, another Vernon, Calif.-based, knitter of seamless apparel, said, “The comfort and softness of seamless knitwear, combined with the use of antimicrobial and hydrophilic yarns, create the best features for an activewear garment. Based on the structure of the knit, the patterns and construction of the garment cannot be matched with any other non-seamless garments. The uniqueness of these garments is obviously a benefit to the retail store.”

Manufacturers are banking on a consumer being hooked once he or she tries on a seamless garment.

“Wearers love seamless garments because they are comfortable, forgiving, not binding, not restrictive, and they show fewer lines under clothes” said Yang. “In addition, seamless apparel will have no waistband failures, no side seam failures, and they are more durable, mainly because they are made mostly from manufactured fibers, such as nylon, using atmospheric garment dyeing. Once consumers wear it, it offers a high-repeat purchase ratio.”

**EVERYBODY ON DECK**

“The world leader in seamless activewear worldwide has been Nike, which has produced numerous items such as pants, capris, tank tops, T-back bras, T-shirts and skirts,” said Neman. “However, more and more activewear companies are getting into seamless everyday.” He predicted that even smaller companies would soon be carrying seamless products.

Moving Comfort, Lowe Alpine, Craft, Hind and Patagonia are all relative newcomers—within the last two years—to an ever-expanding field of players. Seamless knitting machines provide tremendous versatility, because they...
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can create a variety of different stitches within a single garment. For example, a jersey knit can be placed side-by-side with a mesh knit, a rib knit, a jacquard knit, etc. This is virtually impossible to achieve with any other type of knitting process available in the market today and makes the design possibilities endless.

Since activewear garments often involve complex constructions and use specialty yarns, the price of the finished product is higher than other apparel. In spite of this, there doesn’t appear to be resistance.

Elizabeth Goeke, executive vice president of Moving Comfort, agreed, pointing to lots of steps in the process that can drive up the price. “The cost of the garment is dictated by the type of stitches used, how many different types of stitches are used to knit the garment, and the type of yarn used. Then, if spandex or Lycra is required, both the yarn type and percentage used can also drive the price up. However, as best we can see, when the product is placed in the appropriate distribution channels, price is not a barrier.”

TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

“One challenge is the cause and effect of different stitches and yarns used in the knitting,” Goeke added. “There is also a lot of trial and error, because of the high learning curve in the development cycle in the beginning, as a company begins to use the technology.”

The size of the tubes and cylinders used with the seamless knitting machines must also be considered.

“Restrictions with body sizes or tubes used by the knitters can limit the seamless knitting production from a specific supplier,” Goeke said. She explained that the designer or product developer needs to select a seamless knitting supplier based on matching the capabilities of the knitting mill with the sizes and types of garments the manufacturer or retailer wants to produce. For example, women’s or men’s pieces, or even plus sizes.

No matter what technological challenges companies master in the pursuit of new seamless designs and construction, the greatest challenge is communicating the benefits to retailers and consumers.

“The truth is that most retail environments don’t allow enough space to properly merchandise or provide POP displays to promote the product,” Enge said. “Furthermore, these are expensive ventures for a category that is still in its infancy. As with any new technology, communicating the benefits to the consumer is an ongoing challenge.”

Being able to communicate the benefits of a product is critical, and that communication at retail begins with good merchandising—another challenge for retailers.

“One of the drawbacks of seamless knitting is that counter appeal is inferior to cut-and-sew,” Yang said. “Therefore, retailers need mannequin displays, or photos on packages with samples to touch, along with an explanation of the benefits.”

WHAT’S AHEAD

The future looks bright for the outdoor and fitness markets, as the knitting equipment has a broad range of capabilities and those delving into seamless technology have just scratched the surface of what is possible.

“Aafter only a few years of being in the market with lighter-weight garments, designers and knitting mills have begun to find success in heavier-weight products, such as lightweight jackets and pants,” Goeke said.

New advancements coming from fiber producers and yarn spinners will continue to provide innovation from the supplier side. Product choices will make seamless garments even more unique, functional and popular than they are today. Dream big enough and who knows where seamless technology might lead.
Over the past 20 years, National Molding has established itself as the preeminent source for buckle hardware to the outdoor industry. Continuing our history of product innovation, we now introduce our new Meshtek™ series.