

BUYERS TREND TO GREEN FABRICS

New eco-friendly fabrics and innovative yarns combined with different garment construction techniques typified Outdoor Retailer Summer Market 2006. Kathlyn Swantko reports.



The summer '06 Outdoor Retailer was one of the busiest ever events.

Attendees at this season's Outdoor Retailer Show really had to stretch their legs and prepare for a lot of walking, since the newly renovated Salt Palace venue has been expanded to include 400,000 square feet of floor space.

The OR Summer Market was completely sold out for its 25th Birthday celebration, including over 967 exhibitors, 200 new exhibitors, and a plethora of booth expansions. According to the show organisers, the preliminary numbers for the Summer Market, which took place from August 10-13, in Salt Lake City, Utah, indicate that the event attracted 21,711 attendees, including 6,095 retailers from around the globe, representing a 12.4% increase over last year.

"This 2006 Summer Market surpassed many expectations, and we are grateful for the industry's effort in making this one of the most successful OR Summer Markets in history," stated Peter Devin, Group Show Director of Outdoor Retailer. "Overall attendance numbers increased, and we had packed aisles, industry networking and product presentations being done throughout the entire hall!"

The increase in interest in the outdoor market is not surprising when you look at recent statistics compiled by the Outdoor Industry Association. Based on OIA's Retail Audit Topline report for June 2006 that tracks retail sales using Point-of-Sale

transactions, the \$567 million sportswear category had an impressive 36% unit and 22% dollar gain for the year. The sales of base layer apparel, which is a \$312 million category for knitted apparel, is ahead of 2005 by 12% in units and 2% in dollars.

Within the outdoor product area, interest continues in lighter weight constructions and odour control, and "green" eco-friendly fibres, yarns, and fabrics expands as part of a major trend. The resurgence of such post-consumer fabrics as Wellman's Eco-Spun, made from recycled soda bottles, is receiving renewed interest. In addition, there was a buzz about Unifi's 'Repreve' post-industrial recycled polyester yarns, and interest in cotton-rich knit fabrics made with comfortable, ecology-minded, recycled yarns, like those from Green-Spun Textured Knits.

Natural product developments showing promise included merino wool, bamboo, soy, corn-based polymers, coconut, and even seaweed. The list of blends and developments containing eco-friendly products is also increasing, as a growing number of manufacturers jump on the bandwagon, giving the consumer a broad array of "green" apparel products from which to choose.

Albany enters yarn market

Albany International used the OR Summer Market to announce that it is



Jim Jakubecy, president of Green-Spun Textured Knits, which makes yarns from recycled apparel.

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entering the yarn market with the introduction of its new yarn technology 'PrimaLoft SPIN'. The company has partnered with Fox River Mills Inc. to develop socks made with the new technology. PrimaLoft is a unique microfiber insulation originally developed in 1983 under contract with the U.S. Army. It was developed as an alternative to down, which mats and loses its thermal properties when wet. Conversely, PrimaLoft has the ability to keep the wearer warmer and drier than down in both wet and dry conditions.

"The development of PrimaLoft SPIN has allowed us to enter a new market and potentially get into a variety of product offerings," says Tom Mendl, PrimaLoft marketing director. "PrimaLoft SPIN is an optimal blend of PrimaLoft fibers and soft merino wool. It's a new, innovative product that takes comfort to a higher level."

Malden Mills Industries, Inc., based in Lawrence, Massachusetts, presented an expansion of its "Green" Polartec fabrics programme at the show. Malden was the first to bring recycled fleece fabrics to the market over twelve years ago.

Today, recycled yarn technology has advanced dramatically, enabling the company to offer a highly compelling collection of recycled and renewable Polartec fabrics in lightweight base layers to warm fleece, made from Unifi's Repreve yarn.

Repreve is a family of polyester yarns made from 100% recycled materials. Because Repreve is made from recycled materials, it conserves natural resources by eliminating a number of processes needed to produce virgin polyester. Nate Simmons, public relations for Polartec fabrics noted, "100% virgin polyester will always be the core of our business, but when we can come up with a 'green' equivalent, we will use it."

Malden Mills' new earth-friendly performance Polartec fabrics with Repreve encompass more than 20 new styles, and are now available with

The PrimaLoft SPIN socks from Fox River Mills.



Patagonia's Capilene 4 zip neck top is made of 50% recycled fiber from Teijin and the garment is 100% recyclable.

recycled content, including Polartec, Power Dry, Polartec Thermo Pro, and Polartec Wind Pro.

This fall, two new garments will hit the market: Patagonia's Capilene 4 long underwear programme and Timberland's new Mountain Sweater. The expedition weight Capilene 4 long underwear collection consists of a new recycled Polartec Power Dry fabric made from at least 50% recycled polyester fibre, and it will be 100% recyclable through an Eco-Circle program that turns old polyester garments back into yarn.

According to Simmons, this marks the first time recycled fibres are a fine

enough denier to produce soft, comfortable next-to-skin fabrics.

Simmons explained, "With our Polartec products growing to 20 total recycled products this year, our Polartec standard is that in order to be recycled by Polartec, the fabric has to be made from at least 50% recycled product."

Polartec's other new "green" garment is Timberland's Mountain Sweater, which uses renewable wool fibers. The Mountain Sweater is made of a new Polartec Power Dry with wool, which combines wool fibres with polyester to provide technical performance with the natural warmth of wool, along with the environmental benefit of using an annually renewable resource.

Optimer Performance Fibres of Wilmington, Delaware, has created many new blends that were featured at the OR Show. Dri-release is a patented blend of synthetic and natural fibres that provides moisture management, odor control, and next to skin comfort. In the beginning, Dri-release fabrics were mostly made using cotton as the natural fibre component. Still popular, cotton has since been joined by Dri-release Wool, linen, and Tencel. And now, two more products, have been introduced to the Dri-release line: SeaCell, by SeaCell GmbH, Rudolstadt, Germany, a division of Zimmer AG, and Dri-release bamboo.

"Optimer is continually looking for innovative fibres to add to the Dri-release portfolio," said Karen Deniz, head of marketing for Optimer Performance Fibers, Inc., the inventor of Dri-release.

Bamboo is a renewable resource that can be found and cultivated nearly everywhere in the world. In spite of its rigid, upright and vigorous growth pattern, bamboo fibres are extremely soft, breathable, and lightweight. The fibres also take dye quickly, keeping dyestuff requirements to a minimum. The characteristics of bamboo fibre naturally help to accelerate the moisture transfer efficiency of Dri-release.

SeaCell is made of a soft, cellulosic fibre that contains seaweed and activated silver ions. Seaweed's natural minerals and elements protect and



Polartec Power Dry with wool. The interior is 100% polyester so is soft next to the skin, and wicks actively. The outer surface is a blend of wool and polyester.

soothe the skin, and the permanently incorporated silver ions are naturally anti-microbial, while Dri-release delivers its signature cool, dry comfort via its patented moisture release technology. Deniz explained, "We believe this combination of the two technologies is the 'next wave' in comfort."

Another new Dri-release application has been developed for the Latitude 15 line of alpaca sweaters. The lightweight alpaca sweater knit is a plated fabric, utilizing the benefits of Dri-release on the inside of the Latitude 15 all-weather Smart Shirt sweaters. This technical sportswear keeps the wearer warm with a luxury blend of baby alpaca and silk, combined with the moisture wicking properties of Dri-release, and the thermodynamic and anti-static benefits of X-Static.

Deer Creek Fabrics continues to push the envelope on new circular knit product development. Working with a variety of partners based in the Northeast U.S. (including Tweave, Inc. of Norton, Massachusetts, and Draper Knitting of Canton, Massachusetts), this Stamford, Connecticut, based circular knit technology textile company showcased a range of new product developments at the OR Show. Working across industries, Deer Creek draws on its expertise in a variety of markets to bring cross-over technologies into the outdoor performance market.

This season, Steve Lucier, president of Deer Creek, explained that the company has developed some exciting laminated products for the outdoor market, utilizing a combination of stretch wovens and circular knits to create performance solutions for a variety of end uses.

The company featured a laminated fabric for a therapeutic wrap, which consists of a 95% nylon/5% spandex stretch twill laminated to the next-to-skin healing qualities of a 50/50 HoloFiber and a micro polyester circular knit blend. The company also featured a stretch woven laminated to an X-Static circular knit for an outerwear application; a lightweight base layer application containing 50% Sorbtek/ 45% Reflexx/ 5% X-Static; and 100% post consumer warp knits laminated to Wellman's Eco-Spun in a

brushed mesh construction.

Japanese textile company Toray featured several knitted performance fabrics. One of the most interesting fabrics is the 'Entrant' line of waterproof, breathable fabrics. The most recent addition to this fabric line is the Entrant-DT technology, which is a hybrid structure new for the activewear market. Patagonia is using Entrant-DT in its Spraymaster Jacket, which was the Winner of Outside Magazine's 2006 Gear of the Year Award in the shell category.

Other knit fabric developments by Toray included new additions to its FieldSensor, the performance wicking knit fabric, including FieldSensorMX, which combines the Fieldsensor multi-layered structure and "X" shaped yarn to enhance the capillary action for maximum drying comfort; and FieldSensorEX, which incorporates a special hydrophobic yarn into the knit, which prevents the chilliness the wearer often feels after exercising.

Toray's eco-friendly bamboo bicomponent fibre is called Sotake, which consists of an advanced blend of bamboo fibre and Toray's specialty polyester or acrylic fibre.

Toray also showed several other polyester and polyester/Lycra blend performance fabrics targeted towards the swimwear and activewear markets, which provide chlorine protection, UV protection, durability, comfort, softness, color fastness, stain-resistance, and moisture management qualities. **KI**



Double mesh fabric from Deer Creek, knitted with Sorbtek, Reflexx, and X-Static. The outer layer is Sorbtek and the inner layer is Reflexx for stretch and recovery.