When Gore-Tex came to the market, it had the field to itself in the development of its membrane, based on PTFE technology. Since the patent expired, it has seen a number of other companies enter the same arena, often with higher specifications. As a result it had to develop its own technologies to meet the competition, and remain the dominant brand in its sector. 2007 will see the company reposition its branding and it has been working with its partners to ensure that the consumer understands its thinking.

Raising specifications

There was a time, not so long ago, that we were told that most outdoor activities required 'stout footwear'. Then came the introduction of tennis shoes and, while we wore boots in the mountains, a pair of Dunlop 'green flash' were enough for all other sports activities except possibly for rugby and soccer.

Now of course every niche sport has its specialist footwear and the serious athlete better have a big closet to hold them all and keep up with the technological advances in each area. The same goes for clothing. No one argues with the success of W.L.Gore in pushing the market for waterproof clothing, and encouraging the consumer to march into stores all over the world demanding a 'Gore-Tex' jacket instead of a jacket using its membrane. This has been a classic example of ingredient branding, carried out with precision. According to the company, in Europe alone more than 25,000 retailers throughout Europe actively sell its products across multiple categories such as backpacking, snow sports, and city-wear, applied through garments, footwear, gloves and accessories. It is estimated that by the end of 2006, products containing its materials will have generate over €1.5 billion at retail.

Now, nearly three decades on since its introduction, Gore's research has identified that there has been so much segmentation and with it such a proliferation of names that the consumer is starting to become confused. Value for money in part requires being sure the that articles purchased are the correct ones for the job in hand. There is little point spending large sums on Arctic wear if the plan is to use it only to walk down to your local Starbucks for a latte.

Consequently W.L. Gore will announce a new naming system to the retail trade at Winter ispo, to make it easier for retailers and consumers to understand the products and technologies on offer, to be sure that they are buying the right items for the purpose intended. Part of the concept is to identify the individual product areas without creating a user opinion that one category is better than another, as happened



W.L. Gore

before, rather that they are recognised as being appropriate for the areas in which they were designed to perform. There is no doubt that it is easy to be confused by the multiplicity of names from XCR through Paclite to Soft Shell.

So the four new Gore-Tex categories are now defined as follows:

Performance Shell — designed to provide comfort and durable waterproof protection suitable for a wide range of outdoor activities.

Pro Shell — engineered with the most rugged, most breathable fabrics for extended and extreme conditions and designed to meet the demands of outdoor professionals and serious enthusiasts.

Soft Shell — constructed with soft and warm fabrics, designed for reduced layering and improved freedom of movement in colder conditions.

Paclite Shell — which features the lightest, most packable fabrics. They are extremely breathable and are ideal when weight and space are critical.

The new naming system allows the technologies to be applied in any of the product classes mentioned. Thus the comfort mapping will have relevance in both the Performance Shell and the new Pro Shell. As new enabling technologies come along they will fit in with one or more of the four product classes.

As functional apparel is typically chosen for a specific end use, the company believes that the new system makes it easier to recognise and differentiate between the various product classes within the brand. A new hangtag and label programme has been developed to support visual identification at retail, allowing consumers to select the right products for their intended use.

Commenting on the new developments, Gore associate Anna McNamara says: "The needs of skiers, climbers and mountain bikers vary enormously, each having a different level of individual preference, depending on how they intend to use their kit. While professional guidance and know-how from specialist retailers is often asked for, many shoppers opt for self-selection and therefore need concise, informative point-of-sale references to allow them to differentiate between one product and another. We believe this new naming system will be a major step forward for consumers and retailers alike, in the increasingly complex world of performance clothing."

The Pro Shell class is the newest and is an early demonstration of how the system will work. This is about serious sportswear for rugged use; the first item is for rock climbers and mountaineers. It is very light and highly breathable and when new items for watersports or motorcycling, for example, are produced we should expect to see more technologies working in this category.

Product Classes	Enabling Technologies
Gore-Tex Performance Shell	with Extreme Wet Weather construction
Gore-Tex Pro Shell	with Airvantage insulation technology
Gore-Tex Paclite Shell	with Gore comfort mapping technology
Gore-Tex Soft Shell	with Gore micro-grid backer technology

Micro Grid Backer technology

Within the Pro Shell product category there are 2-layer and 3-layer constructions. The 3-layer Pro Shell features a technology that is claimed to be the first of its kind: the new Gore Micro Grid Backer. The structure is based on a new type of weave that is extremely breathable, abrasion resistant and lightweight.

This combination of materials teams up to produce a new 3-layer laminate with improved abrasion resistance, breathability, lighter weight and superior comfort for wearers in sports such as mountaineering, rock climbing, ice climbing and ski mountaineering. The new backer material and the use of extremely thin seam sealing tape means these jackets are now more than 60g lighter than previous high-end Gore-Tex garments. The Micro Grid Backer technology has been specifically engineered to provide improved comfort on the inside for the wearer as it has a smoother, more supple finish. Jackets made using this new technology fit smoothly over base layers, as ease of getting the jacket on and off was found to be important with users.

The new Pro Shell garments are extremely breathable (some laminates achieve RET 3), and they have been shown to be completely waterproof even after more than 500 hours of flexing and abrasion when wet. A number of brands including Arc'Teryx, Marmot, Berghaus, Haglofs, Lowe Alpine, Mammut and Rossignol, will feature this system for autumn 2007.

Experience more

The new programme has been developed over a considerable time and the plan is to use ispo, OR and the early spring months to explain the changes to retailers in preparation for a full autumn launch. For Europe alone, €80m has been earmarked for an integrated campaign to grow the brand. The components include the new naming system, communications concept, brand slogan, brand design and a global Internet platform. The enhanced brand promise will be fulfilled by a significant number of innovations coming to the market in autumn/winter 2007/2008. Central to this is ensuring the Gore-Tex name is at the fore. As brand manager, Tomas Vucurevic says: "With an ever increasing number of brands on the market in the functional textiles sector, consumers no longer know what different brands stand for." The new brand slogan is an invitation to: Experience More.