New guys on the block

A dream came true for forty-eight young entrepreneurs who exhibited for the first time at the Winter Ispo 2000, which took place in Munich recently. Selected from among a short list of seventy, these were the winners in the New Brands-Brand New competition sponsored jointly by Ispo organisers, Messe München, and international chemical and fibre manufacturer DuPont.

Criteria for selection by an international jury, competent in a variety of functions and drawn from companies connected with the sports industry, were relatively straightforward: the brand or company had to be younger than four years old; the product, brand or concept had to be new and innovative, and the entrepreneur should not previously have exhibited at Ispo.

Entries were submitted from European countries and the USA. The diversity of the innovative products and services ranged from designs in new high-tech fabrics to a hands-free cycle pump; from rucksacks designed for extreme conditions to the world's first interchangeable ski-binding system; from durable watches and safety devices to high-flying kites. In fact, anything and everything connected to the sporting world in its widest sense was eligible, under certain conditions, to enter the contest.

Winning ways

Overall winner with his kite surfer, Robby Naish, of Naish Sails based in Hawaii, was full of praise for the competition and for being able to have a sales booth put at the company's disposal at Ispo, generally recognised as the world's largest trade fair for sports equipment and fashion. The kites are a direct development from the surfing sails for which the company is noted, and, together with its Pirate kiteboards, the project has taken two years to perfect. Looking like an n-shaped sail, the inflatable strut system is simple to use. It pumps up in seconds, and there are no bridle lines to get tangled. The unique body shape and self-launching frame make the sport an ideal one for beginners while allowing the more advanced to push the limits.

These high-performance kites and kite-boards give one the sensation of flying, even over flat water. Leaps of up to 13 meters are possible, but Naish advises beginners to start with a small sail and only to use it over water.

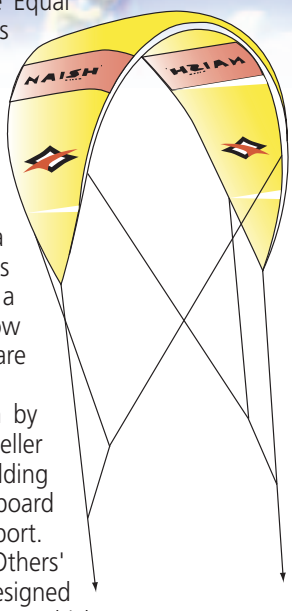
The kite surfer sensibly comes with a warning that it is not suitable for those under the age of eighteen.

Participants' products were divided into four categories, from each of which a winner was also chosen. In the Winter Hardware category, the avalanche ball was the winning entry: a simple and compact avalanche rescue system which weighs only 1 kg - including its pack. Designed by two young Austrians who were themselves caught in an avalanche in 1998, this innovative and life-saving idea, which functions without batteries or other equipment, has been taken up and produced by K2, the manufacturers of snow sports fashion and equipment.

According to reports issued by the Swiss institute for Snow and Avalanche Research, most victims are buried only a metre below the surface. If they could be found quickly many would survive. The avalanche ball is released by a grab loop fixed at shoulder level. A simple pull, the red ball opens instantaneously - rather like a Chinese lantern - and 'swims' behind the boarder or skier on the top of the snow. It is attached to a firmly belted rucksack by a 6-metre long cord. This can then be followed quickly to where the person is buried and digging out can start immediately.



Robby Naish and his kite surfer (below).



Winner in the Sportswear section was the Equal Skateboard Company. Founded just two years ago by brothers Andreas and Michael Preißler, their aim was to produce skate and street wear for young people at affordable prices as a counter-balance to expensive imported US products. Trying to break into the sportswear market takes courage, but by using top quality fabrics decorated with imaginative logos and a range of sweat and T-shirts, cargo pants, jeans and nylon pants (with detachable legs) and a range of beanies and Flex Fit caps - and now having been chosen as prize winners, they are convinced they are on the right track.

The Summer Hardware category was won by Indiana of Switzerland. Three years ago Chris Peller turned his basement hobby into a business building longboards, a superior and extended skateboard which has given new impetus to an existing sport.

Nixon Watches USA, were winners in the 'Others' category with a trendy collection of watches designed specifically for snowboarders, skaters and surfers which are outstanding in durability and styling.

Presented to these five winners was a cheque for DM1500 each to be spent at Globetrotter, and as Pierre Duffar, European manager for DuPont Lycra, said: "... a plaque to remind you of your win when the money is spent."

Driving forces

Looking around the other 43 stands which appeared more open than they actually were (through the use of see-through muslin-like fabric walls), one was impressed by the diversity of products and concepts and the dynamic, and often unconventional ways, in which these young brands promote themselves.

Many of the products are a result of young sportsmen not finding just the right piece of equipment or the gear for their own activity.

French company Escam has solved the problem of how to retract wheels on roller skates in situations where roller skating is not permitted i.e. shops, railway platforms and cinemas. A simple heel ratchet is pulled up and the wheels are raised to just above floor level enabling one to walk on the profiled sole of the tough but stylish boots. In leather, jeans optic and rubber, and

weighing only 1kg including wheels, these generated many admiring glances and, as Claude Allouche said: "We have been very surprised by the interest that has been shown in our product here at Ispo. In fact, we cannot believe it!"

Also pleased with the interest shown was Rupert Jessett of Powder Blues of London. He thought the competition was a 'great idea', but wished that the presentation party had been held 'on-site'. He felt this would have attracted more attention to the booths and to the competition's aims which he argued were being by-passed by a large proportion of visitors. Powder Blues won its discounted booth at Ispo with its innovative snowboard and carving ski glove which really does keep out the snow. An inner gaiter with a solid cuff is placed around the wrist, the jacket cuff goes over this and is held in place by the glove which is pulled on and fixed on top of the solid cuff by a ratchet fastener to create a complete seal. This is available in standard version in sizes for 7-year-olds to adults.

What could be worse than to be up there in the snow with a screw loose? Perhaps only being out in the wild country on your mountain bike with the same problem. The answer is a small gadget which William (Bill) Prophet has devised: the U-Turn multitool. Marketed by Prophet - the company - the U-Turn is worn on a chain around the neck, an idea taken over from Prophet's heavy metal skateboarders jewellery range. It is an all-purpose mini composite consisting of 3, 4, 5 and 6mm Allen keys, a universal socket, posidrive and narrow head posidrive screwdrivers and a 17mm nut remover. This clips into the necklace socket and is quickly and easily removed for use.

Premiered for its rucksacks with internal ultra-lightweight carbon frames was the Austrian company, Urban Rock. The patented frame is manufactured by a unique process and has been designed to make an important contribution to stability and strength at the same time as reducing the weight of the finished article. The biking and hiking styles have a special 3-way air circulation system which reduces condensation, and the rucksacks all have external pockets and equipment-specific fasteners for helmet, ice-axe, skis, water bottle etc. The rucksack bodies are made of DuPont's Cordura and Schoeller's Dynatech.

How to stop losing your gloves, or what to do with them when you get too hot, is not a new problem. Knütes, however, may just be the answer, as a new concept in gloves, scarves, ear muffs and blankets using Malden Mills' recycled Polartec fleece and Windbloc treatment. The gloves in particular were recommended to Ispo visitors as environmentally sound, Munich-produced products. The temperature can be regulated through side zippers - you can even zip-up with a friend as the zippers are open-ended - and you can pop out your hand to get something from a pocket without worrying about dropping a glove as it sits firmly around the wrist. The award winning Doubleglove is the official runners' mitten of the New York and Berlin Marathons. Speed and protection are the paramount characteristics demanded from the technical crossover collection for snowboarders and skiers from US manufacturer Ten80. Coupled to the style and colour from designer, and World Cup Freestyle champion, Nelson Carmichael, it is this which made the company runner-up in the Ispo New Brands-Brand New competition. All garments in the new winter 2001 season range are completely seam sealed and come with 3M Thinsulate Ultra insulation as an option. All-round, 18% Kevlar scuff guards on ankle cuffs for boarder pants are new, and the use of Celtech as an outer fabric in the garments gives them a softer feel without any loss of durability and weatherproofing properties.

Speed skiing champion Jeffrey Hamilton, who was present at Ispo, rated the products highly for their details. Inside goggle and pass pockets and key clip, detachable powder cuff, armpit zips for ventilation, along with fleece chin guard and detachable hide-away hood, are just some of the invisible details of the sleek



K2 Avalanche Ball



uncluttered look of the jackets. Crossover garments have articulated knees and elbows, snow gaiters and are adjustable at waist, wrist and ankle.

'Do what you do best' is the motto for Joines USA. And the young people in this venture who come from the skate and snowboarding scene know just what that stands for. Its garments are a projection of the image from sport into lifestyle and street wear fashion and have been selling in specialised stores for the past 18 months. Offering good quality sweats and T-shirts, pants and beanies at prices that permit retailers to add a decent mark-up and still sell for what elsewhere would only be wholesale price, this company was satisfied with its showing at Ispo. Flo Luschnig, speaking for Joines, said that exposure at Ispo had definitely given its sales a boost, but they would have preferred its booth to have been in the section with companies producing similar products so that comparisons would be easier.

Objectives achieved

In summing up, the ideas behind the competition, which were to provide these young inventors and designers with a forum to make new contacts, to present their products and themselves to an international audience and to the press, was achieved. All exhibitors were more than pleased to have had the opportunity to experience such an exhibition from the 'inside' and many hope to return either by winning again or obtaining a booth themselves at Ispo. The deadline for entries for the next New Brands - Brand New is May 5th - just enough time if you get your skates on.

Kay Turtle