

Aces on court

Once there was a time when one pair of 'tennis' shoes were used for years to play on all court surfaces and the same shoes were often worn for leisurewear too. Since consumers have become conscious of the benefits of specific shoes for specific court surfaces, been advised on the advantages of the new technologies in footwear, and have had more cash to spend on these, 'buying separate shoes for leisure', there has been a revolution in products from the major sports footwear manufacturers. This brought about a great boom in the industry during the eighties and early nineties.

Things have changed however

A study produced by Sports Tracking Europe on sports shoe sales in the German market during 1999 found that this sector of the footwear market was well down in most areas on 1998 sales, except for sport/leisure shoes which increased by a staggering 27.4%, and running shoes by 5.5%. The demand for tennis shoes has been decreasing for the past five years, and although the outlook for 2001 is much rosier - and not just because pink shoes have been introduced in some women's styles - the general upsurge in interest in the sport was noticeable at recent exhibitions, with renewed emphasis on high-tech, innovative tennis shoes geared for comfort and all-round game improvement.

A research project run by Dr. Darren Stefanyshyn, at the University of Calgary in Canada, on sport shoes resulted in the production of running shoes which, by incorporating specially developed vibration absorbing stiff soles, were reckoned to improve a marathon runner's performance by four minutes - a deciding factor between being first or twenty-first. A further test with these 'wonder shoes' - whose stiff sole does not allow the metatarsal-phalangeal joint to bend - was with thirty top sprinters which showed an average increase in sprint velocity of 1.7%.

The fact that these shoes, although individually made-to-measure, as opposed to being produced on a last for thousands of feet, and no matter how state-of-the-art the inner and middle soles of these shoes may be, still produced abrasion in some areas was underlined by tests at a meeting in Munich during 2000 entitled: "Orthotist meets the Scientist". There, Dr Stefanyshyn and his team of researchers came to the conclusion that even made-to-measure

shoes and insoles can turn wonder shoes into 'wounder' shoes, but that the wound quota is around 20% with insoles, as opposed to 60% without. A plea for more co-operation between shoemakers and orthopaedists was made at that meeting, and comfort, it was stated, is by far the most important factor. Applied to the tennis scene, where different demands are made on feet according to players' sex, age, build and standard of play, as well as type of court, there seems little chance that most feet will be comfortable. But it will not be for lack of trying or innovation on the part of manufacturers, orthotists and footwear designers in conjunction with top players. (On court at summer ispo 2000, for instance, were some of the most eye-catching styles from major tennis shoe manufacturers all of which they claim "... will improve your game by protecting your feet.").

With such names under contract as Hingis, Kiefer and Kournikova and the youngest Number One ever, Marat Safin, adidas has high profile players with which to discuss the requirements for their latest tennis shoe ranges. Basically, while Safin wears its tournament shoe Barricoda, there is a style and price range to suit everyone in its F/S Collection. Its 'Equipment Feather II' introduces a clay court style with a special middle sole construction specifically for competition players. Its two-part outer sole: traditional herring bone rib outer profile and knobs on the inner side offer best possible slide and grip properties where needed. The extended torsion system with supporting elements improves control and stability of the foot. Toe-caps in adituff protect against wear, and add optically to the attractive lacing and colour placing in lunar, space and blast.

Asics, the first company to ban PVC from all its products, has introduced the use of its stability cradle - its value already proven in its Gel-Kayano running shoes - into the company's latest tennis shoe range Gel-chart/Gel-chart W for both men and women and Gel-Hardhitter for men. This



Main photograph: Martina Hingis plays in adidas Poised (above).

cradle offers extra stability to the rear and mid-foot areas where extra support is needed during tennis players' fore and side movements. Mesh inserts in heel and tongue, coupled with Rhino-skin forefoot reinforcement and hard plastic shell around the heel, this shoe incorporates logo stripes in the lacing system which are not only optically appealing but underline the cradle effect of the shoe. The hidden EVA mid-sole and boards in the rear foot offer the maximum cushioning.

A clear, no nonsense tennis shoe is produced by Italian Diadora with its Elite Pro D.A.2 for women in nappa leather with a micro-perforated leather upper insert, both decorative and breathable. Its Comfort Competition Bridge (CCB) special network, in thermal plastic polyurethane, helps control turning in mid-foot area, and Ergofit removable antibacterial insole is complemented by an abrasion-fast Duratech 5000 and 2500 outer sole suitable for all court surfaces. A parallel style for men is also available and with such names as Larsson, Kuerten and Rosset 'footing' for them, there is no lack of input from top players in its designs.

Retro

Fila has produced a retro-look from the 70s in navy/off-white, and foam/red models in both full leather and a combination of leather and mesh. Expected to appeal to younger female tennis enthusiasts here are "Oress" and Edgery", two models with double collar concept for better heel fitting. With their Masters Series, Fila sets new standards: the visible 3-action shock absorbing technology of this series improves action in fore and rear foot areas, while the middle foot is protected and supported by a TPU shaft. An Evergrip rubber outer sole guarantees longer life and the toe is protected by an abrasion resistant rubber cap. Colour is introduced here too.

Austrian sport products manufacturer Head introduced a new footwear division at the beginning of the Millennium, specifically to promote its sports shoe business world-wide. The first fruits of this labour are in three distinct sections: athletic, mountain and lifestyle. Tennis is organised along with fitness in the athletic section and is ranged under the ad.apt system (ad. = anatomic design, apt. = adaptive performance technology).

Keeping cool in the sector is K-Swiss with its Glaciator 7.0 tennis shoe. To increase the air flow properties of the shoe, the uppers are covered in metallic mesh (Circu-Flow-Cooling system). The removable innersole is perforated to increase perspiration absorption, while the middle sole comprises a special aluminium layer which, it is claimed, prevents heat from the outer sole gaining access to the inside of the shoe. This Heat Deflection Core (HDC) together with the shoe's other cooling attributes prevents build-up of bacteria, and thus smell, in the shoe. The Aoesta rubber outer sole is extra light and the skeleton profile is specially created for clay court play.



Asics Gel-Hardhitter from their latest tennis range.

Old is new might be a maxim for Lacoste's Rival tennis range in traditional white and blue, but on a second look the high reinforced toe-cap, the new lacing idea and the leather uppers are all up-to-the-minute functional features ensuring stability and durability. The middle sole is of Phylon while the outer sole comes in two profiles, one each for hard and clay court surfaces.

Set for a winner is Lotto's 'Master 2000 BFC' tennis shoe in two variations: "Clay" for clay court and "Speed" for synthetic surfaces. Both models incorporate biomechanical foot control (BFC) technology which guarantees high flexibility of the sole, an anatomical design which supports the foot both on the inner and outer edges while stabilising the heel.

Fresh support

A new concept in lacing which gives extra support to the foot as well as making the tennis shoe optically pleasing comes from the Prince stable. Its "TT Vendetta" model in black and white, blue/white and white/silver for the ladies, all with just a racy hint of orange, is a court stealer. The 3D arch stabiliser - which encapsulates the foot giving optimum support to the whole foot - together with the 360 degree lacing system form a three dimensional cage for greater performance, stability and fit.

US tennis star Serena Williams brings glamour to the tennis courts and is definitely 'in the pink' with Puma's "Cellarator Exhale" a quality performance based, comfortable and functional courtshoe in a beetroot shade of pink, denim and white. It is also available in white/surf/light grey.

This shoe uses Puma's Cellarator advanced technology - tried and tested in its football boots for the European Championships 1999 - in combining the outer sole, mid sole and sock liner to provide superior cushioning and stability. Uppers are microfibre Clarino and mesh, outer sole is in durable Evertrack high abrasion rubber



Sensation DST02 from Wilson Tennis.

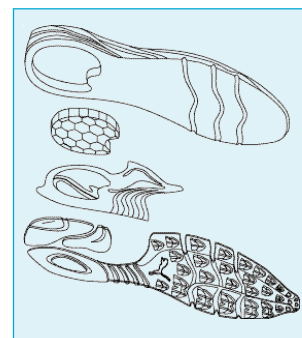
and the sock liner is removable, permitting insoles to be added. The zipper closure is a fashion detail taken from the street which complements the individual style of this shoe and will definitely appeal to the younger set.

First seen on the courts just over a year ago were tennis shoes from US tennis concern Wilson - a household name in the tennis world. For 2001 the company has updated its DST (Dynosphere Technology) based on hundreds of tough thermoplastic rubber balls set in chambers under the heel and ball of the foot to absorb the shock when the foot touches the court - a principle based on the natural fat pads on the human foot. The new lines for men and women "Sensation DST02" are 35 % lighter than the original models due to an air chamber at centre heel. When the

heel is trod on, the enclosed air is pressed through into those chambers filled with DST, this leads to a 3D compression and improves shock absorption. "Stable Wrap" technology is where the middle sole is directly integrated into the lacing system. Herringbone design profile on Duralast Supreme outer sole guarantees optimum grip on hard court surfaces. Two innersoles are included which provide extra shock absorption and make the shoes suitable for both clay and hard courts.

The current tennis shoe scene is not short of innovation in both design and technology, and glamour almost certainly will play a significant role in the choice consumers make. Perhaps the latest impulses set by the industry will give the game the boost it sorely needs at present. 🍄

Kay Turtle



Puma's cell structure absorbs the force of each footfall at the point of impact.