

RISE TO THE CHALLENGE: THONI MARA AND NILIT

Working together to tackle specific supply chain needs: German running apparel brand Thoni Mara and Israeli yarns and fibres manufacturer Nilit.

Yarns that will run and run

Athletic apparel brand Thoni Mara is making a name for itself among serious runners all over northern Europe, especially in its home market, Germany.

It's keen on innovation, and last year became the first sports brand to put Schoeller Technologies' coldblack—which reduces the absorption of solar rays so that dark textiles, in particular, heat up significantly less when exposed to sunlight—into a running shirt; the technology featured in the company's Premium collection. Duathlon, triathlon and Ironman champion Ulrike Schwalbe is one of the prominent athletes who is on the record as saying the company's running shirts are her favourite.

And that was before its new Green Fee collection came onto the market. Green Fee and Premium are, perhaps, the best examples yet of the importance Thoni Mara places on two particular qualities: care for the environment and comfort for the wearer. For this reason, it chose its supply chain partners for the collections with care. Prominent among these was Israeli nylon 6.6 fibres manufacturer Nilit, which supplied two of its yarns, EcoCare and Aquarius, for the shirts.

The sportswear company said on announcing the development that the shirt collections are designed for "superior performance and comfort while being kind to the environment".

Nilit EcoCare is made of recycled polymer (certified by US-based SCS), which helps manufacturers generate less waste and consume less water and energy. It provides high levels of colour depth and uniform dyeability. Aquarius is a high-performance yarn engineered to wick



The Green Fee running top collection uses Nilit's EcoCare to emphasise its environmental credentials.

 Thoni Mara

away moisture because, the manufacturer says, the hydrophilic properties are intrinsic in the fibre and will remain for the life of the garment. It has a triple-T cross-section of the filaments, which increases the surface area for moisture management and creates channels that carry moisture away from the body.

Thoni Mara chief executive, Christian Schwab, comments: "We have exacting standards for every aspect of our products and these Nilit yarns fully meet our requirements for colour, durability, moisture management and environmental friendliness."

For Alon Weiser, head of research and development at Nilit, the yarns and the shirts constitute "a perfect match". EcoCare is made of recycled polymer that provides high levels of colour depth and uniform dyeability. Aquarius is a high-performance yarn engineered to wick away moisture. Both products work well, Nilit says, in hosiery and circular knit applications.

Mr Weiser's colleague, Lisa Dolde, Nilit sales manager for Germany, believes that Thoni Mara and the brand's customers reflect the higher consciousness of environmental issues among businesses and consumers in that country, and that this helped her company because it made the client more open to investing in high-quality yarns that met its exacting specifications. "Thoni Mara had been a customer of ours for several years already," she explains, "buying other specialty-effect yarns." The relationship, therefore, is not a new one. There are regular meetings between the two companies, with Thoni Mara one of the companies to whom Nilit always seeks to present its latest collections.

When Aquarius first featured at one of these meetings, initial test results on its moisture management capacity were part of the presentation. The German company liked what it saw, and went on to carry out tests of its own on the yarn before being satisfied that it was right for the Premium collection. Then, during its sampling of EcoCare, the sportswear brand showed off some prototypes at ispo 2010 in February and received a positive reaction from visitors.

One of the things that many runners like about Thoni Mara is that the company has its own knitting machines and carries out its own manufacturing in Germany, at its facility in Thum, near Chemnitz. "This is unusual and is one of the company's marketing tags," Lisa Dolde says. "It means we supply our yarns directly to them, rather than to any third-party manufacturer. It's not the mass market; it's small and specialist, but it is an interesting company and it's very passionate about what it does."

The Israeli company can only guarantee the performance of the yarn, not of a fabric or finished product. Before it issues hang-tags for its yarns, including Aquarius and EcoCare, customers submit sample garments for the Nilit laboratory to look at close up. This too has proved to be a constructive part of the dialogue between the two supply chain partners, a dialogue that is ongoing.

Nilit hopes to take more orders from the specialist running apparel brand and for the two companies to grow their success together. And, as to where this might lead in the future, Alon Weiser comments that Nilit is "always working on something new", that innovation is ongoing as it works to meet changing market needs. These new ideas will make their way into future collections that Nilit will present to Thoni Mara. Premium and Green Fee seem likely to be the first of a string of the brand's collections to benefit from its partner's know-how. 🌐

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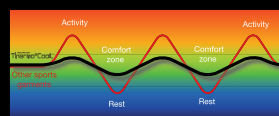


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