Colour comes back to the slopes

by Penny Leese

Brilliant clashing colours and patterns will brighten up the ski slopes next winter. The most recent ispo fair, showcasing winter 2010 sportswear and equipment, gave customers a good reason to buy. Styles and colours were fresh looking and there was plenty for all the family. On top of this, there had been lots of snow all over Europe throughout the current winter so retailers had sold their stocks of winter boots.

Keep warm

When you are out in the winter snow, life can be pretty miserable if you can't keep warm, and feet and hands get cold first. There were plenty of ways to keep feet and hands dry and thus warm. Mountain Hardware's gloves used the well-known OutDry technology, a waterproof system without an inner "bootee/glove" and thus a lightweight solution that does not compromise feel when taking part in competitive winter sports. The same system is used by Kamik for its children's shell boots.

One of the more technical ways to keep warm was the Omni Heat system from Columbia, just launched in Europe. Here the boots have an electric socket on the shaft and can be plugged into the mains and warmed up overnight. The marketing is clear and simple and the message easy for the public to understand, which is part of its success up to now. Salmon's Climatherm boots have a layer of polyester EVA built all around the foot from toes to heel to prove a lightweight and slim insulation solution. The Climatherm HD is designed to withstand temperatures down to -25ºC.

The MammutThermo puts an end to the sensation of cold toes on ice climbing expeditions and mountain tours. It has Thinsulate Ultra 200 lining, gaiters and Velcro closure, and it weighs just 990 grammes, so it is a lightweight among crampon compatible winter mountain boots—important in this sport. The elastic, fold-down gaiter, which can be adjusted using hook-and-loop closures, makes sure that nothing penetrates inside, while the Hybrid Shell makes the boot hard only in those places where reinforcement is really needed. The construction is based on a combination of soft inner and stable outer materials, allowing the boot to adapt comfortably to the mountaineer's foot. Another benefit in terms of comfort is the asymmetric three-zone lacing. The instep, heel and shaft can be laced separately, ensuring outstanding support for any shape of foot. The additional pressure on the big toe generated by the asymmetric lacing also allows a more precise tread.



Snowfall Thermo by Columbia.
Columbia

You need to be warm inside the bivouac or cabin in the winter too; The North Face's new duvet style slippers now have a rubber sole so that they can also be worn for very short trips outdoors or in cold cabins.

Less high tech are the warm boa and fur linings, but when combined with a breathable waterproof system like Gore-Tex, or eVent (used by Teva) they make going out in the winter a pleasure.

Lightweight

However, often, even in winter, keen cross trail and road runners will go for lightweight and cushioning before water resistance. Zoot's ultra-race running shoes have finger holes in the tongue and backtab for pulling the shoes on and off, a side placed speed lace locker and ultra-



Sorel kids snow boots.
Sorel



Rolling sole from Teva with neon touches - bright colours for winter.
Teva

light Strobel construction with just a small carbon torsion support in the arch area. The company says they can even be worn barefoot.

Icebug's off-trail Celeritas running shoe is designed primarily for fast runners. The sole has a sticky rubber compound, with aggressive cleats arranged in a diagonal pattern. This variation of a tractor tyre design is optimised to grip on both hard and soft ground. It channels away mud, which provides traction and acts self-cleaning. This version has hard plastic studs for non-slip on winter surfaces such as compacted snow and ice. The last is anatomically shaped, with very little "correction" built into the support structure. The foot is allowed to keep its natural movement. The upper is a strong and light fine rip-stop nylon with protecPU reinforcement and moulded lace holes. Materials and constructions are developed not only to be light when the shoe is dry, but also—in what is often the real use conditions—when it's wet. Weight increase is less than 25%. Even though the dry weight is only 225 grammes in US size 9, the Swedish design team is constantly working out ways to strip out more and get it further down.

Southern comfort

In southern countries winter sports don't always mean snow—there are still badminton, tennis, golf and other all year round pursuits. Munich of Spain makes badminton, indoor inspired multi sports shoes and concentrates on exciting colour and material combinations, but on just one or two similar patterns, creating its own special look. And for winter 2010, colour is very important.

All the family

A few years ago most winter sports equipment was designed by men, for men. Women and kids had to make do often with scaled down versions—with women's made versions in a basic pink or light blue colour way. Now clothing, equipment and footwear all come in dedicated genders. At ispo, it was obvious that skiing and snowboarding especially are family activities; and there was plenty to choose from. More companies are making smaller versions of their clothes and shoes for kids, but the dedicated kids sports brands are also doing well. Bright colours and graphic prints attract the younger, more fashionable customers, and these prints are on clothes and shoes too.

Nonslip

With 2009 and early 2010 having been such a snowy and icy winter in many parts of the northern hemisphere, there were also a lot of blocks of ice at ispo where customers could test the non-slip

Kids shoes by Munich of Spain.
Munich of Spain



abilities of various soles. Scandinavians especially had taken this to heart—from Hanwag to Icebug. Icebug's retractable metal studs, now an industry classic, have been expanded on. There is a Bug Web, a removable web with metal studs that merges perfectly with the outsole and can just be dragged over. The new trail runners with built in spikes feature hard plastic non-metal spikes, more practical for multi surfaces. Hanwag's sole has microscopic glass particles embedded in the rubber for maximum traction on slippery ice.

Classics return

Together with the Moncler duvet jacket, classics are also having a revival, but in new materials. Moon Boots come in quilted patent, and more often shaggy fur versions, in colours to match the ski outfits. Top grade leather welted boots by Luis Trenker fit the Bavarian lifestyle with wool tweed jackets and three quarter hose.

Shock absorption

Swiss running footwear brand On was the overall winner of this year's ispo Brand New Awards. One of the people in charge is Swiss triathlete Olivier Bernhard. He had realised that he felt much less pain when running on gravel or sand covered trails, which would allow his foot to softly glide into every step. The engineer observed that there are two forces at work when running: the vertical and the horizontal impact. He discovered that it is the horizontal impactwhich causes the most damage to muscle cells, ligaments and joints. But most existing running shoes only absorb the vertical impact. The engineer wanted to create a running shoe, which would allow a runner to land as softly as on sand and to push off as effectively as on concrete. The running shoes have a new outsole system he called CloudTec technology. With a hollow 3-D element incorporated in the outsole, the running shoe ensures that not only vertical but also horizontal impacts are reduced by up to 30%. In addition, the innovative cushioning elements are responsible for the fact that the postural muscles, which can degenerate when wearing over-supportive regular running shoes, are strengthened and thus additionally stabilise the joints in a natural way. The result is an unbelievably gentle, almost rolling running experience— 'running lightly as if on clouds' — while at the same time providing extra forward momentum for a quicker run. Because of its high level of innovation, On CloudTec has been granted worldwide patents.

Inside the shoes

What goes on inside the shoe is as important as what goes on outside. It is common today for a runner's gait to be evaluated when they buy a new pair of shoes. Prospective marathon runners get custom orthotics at the start of training, to prevent any long term damage. A foot consists of 26 bones, 32 muscles and tendons and 107 ligaments. It has two main arches: the midfoot arch (runs length-wise, the largest arch) and the forefoot arch (the traverse arch, which is not visible from the side). Together with the heel pad (the fatty tissue below the heel), they provide the foot's natural shock absorption. When the foot makes contact with the ground, the arches flatten, and when the foot is lifted, they resume their original shape. The Arch Flex System (AFS) developed by Ortolab AB, the leading Scandinavian manufacturer of custom made footbeds, gives the two main arches what they call dynamic support. This means that the natural movement of the arches is not blocked, the arches receive proper support through all of the phases of the step, and when the arches are at their flattest they are still supported and don't collapse. Since the muscles of the feet are still working, a healthy foot won't get lazy and weak as can happen when too much support is provided. Custom made footbeds are expensive, so the Arch Flex System was interpreted into a range of pre-fabricated footbeds. AFS uses Ortolab's patents for dynamic arch support but it is of course also vital to have the support in the right place. The start and finish of the length-wise arch, the position of the metatarsal pad behind the metatarsal heads is important. The foot is measured for length, then under the arch, when resting. There is a footbed for each European size and each one comes in three different arch height options.



Indoor slippers with outdoor soles, The North Face.
WTP