



Our contributing editor Kay Turtle said that she wanted to retire slowly, and improve her golf game quickly. Instead we asked her to take a long, hard look into the performance baselayers on offer at ispo Summer 2002.

Fun and function undercover

One of the most important factors affecting the design, development and manufacture of sportswear as a whole is the comfort factor. Garments that cause one to perspire, that lose shape after exercise, and lose colour and form after a few washes should all be a thing of the past if the products shown at ispo Summer 2002 are anything to go by.

Beginning with the base layer, and it is here that comfort starts, the latest sports underwear trends show just how modern technology has changed the look, feel, and function of this segment. With the emphasis on FUNCTIONality, base layer products were shown to be fun and fully functional in novel textiles, most too attractive to be worn only undercover, and for many products this could be as much the secret of their success as their tangible comfort.

Shape retention and the 'push-pull' effects of fabric mixtures during workout are essential for muscle support as well as keeping the garment - and the body - within its outline. And this is equally important in the underwear lines that often double as next-to-skin products and as outerwear. Modern base-layer fabrics are expected to regulate themselves between wearings and to retain their shape even after frequent washing.

There is an even-handed argument for antibacterial and antimicrobial treatments: on the one hand there are the obvious benefits of preventing the increase of bacteria when the inner climate of underwear gets hot and sweaty. On the other, many such products kill off healthy bacteria. The introduction of silver into fibres for base layer products (see also our report in this issue) has eliminated many of these problems, and successfully used in lingerie and sports underwear.

Causing a stir on the sportswear scene is Cargill Dow, producing its maize-based fibres under the NatureWorks label. This natural product, according to its manufacturers, achieved outstanding rankings in terms of wicking, odour retention, resilience and comfort, and as such is more than suitable for base layer garments. UK knitters Cloverbrook and Penn Nyla have both introduced jersey base-layer fabric made from NatureWorks fibres during the past year, and the interest this generated at ispo Summer was underlined by Cloverbrook product manager Anna Bradley who stated: "By adding NatureWorks fibres to our technical range of performance products, we feel we can tell a green story to our customers in terms of the sustainability of the fibre source and the degradability of the used product."

This thought was echoed by Mark Pilgrim, sales manager for Penn Nyla who said: "We see NatureWorks as the first rung on the ladder to more environmentally sound active sportswear."

Also actively supporting the green theme, by using skin friendly Öko-Tex Standard 100 products and by not using any bactericidal coatings, is Austrian sportswear manufacturer Loeffler. The company's sports underwear carries the logo 'No risk: Much fun' and the FUNCTIONality of all garments is said to be guaranteed. Its Man and Lady X-light ranges include mesh undershirts and slips in 100 per cent polypropylene that can be worn in the gym without any cover-up. Produced for extreme conditions the fabric is extra light, very fine, soft, and extremely elastic. The fronts are in a rib knit fabric and the longer length backs are in mesh for extra transpiration. Specialised underwear in Transtex - a terry-type fabric that incorporates X-light - is also a major line this company.

Flex and Cool - a new dimension in underwear with Sympatex technology from Maier sports - is a follow on from the company's autumn/winter range. In a specially developed fabric of 94% polyester, 6% elastane, this range is particularly skin friendly and fits perfectly. A second line combining rib knit and mesh fabric is called Ventilate, and regulates body climate throughout a workout.

DuPont has added a new name to its long list of textile applications, but not in the sense of a solus-branded outcome.

Aquator Weather Protection fabrics, based on DuPont branded fibres and fabrics, are multifunctional products tailored to specific customer needs.

The stretch fabrics aspect in particular has found favour with sports underwear manufacturers for its balance of aesthetics, comfort and performance.

Swedish manufacturer of sportswear Casall opted for DuPont's Tactel for its range of underwear premiered in Munich. Using this new product in combination with Nylstar's Meryl micromesh, this company has produced a high performance series of tops, bras and slips

Falke's differential-torsion knit highlights the performance in its Ergonomic Sport Underwear series.





that are constructed to give the best possible fit. Bras have adjustable shoulder straps, a back closure and built in cups. They are also available for larger bust sizes. Some bras are wired, while other bra-tops have linings in the front and sides for extra support. Moisture transport is particularly good in Casall's underwear ranges for men and women, according to Carl-Axel Surtevall, owner of the company, due to the use of Aquator which guarantees to leave the body dry during exercise.

Building on its success with its Ergonomic Sports System in the autumn/winter 2002 collection, Falke has launched a sports underwear series. Working with the Sports Sciences department at Cologne University, Falke measured the demands made on the human anatomy during of sports activities, and used the results as a basis for the new line. Bodily support, particularly for women, and personal climate control were the main considerations.

Relying heavily on a three-dimensional circular knitting technique, the result is a sculptured bodyline that is tri-elastic and fits the skin snugly. Differential-torsion knit patterns cater for the areas.

Malden's Polartec PowerDry range of fabrics in 100 per cent polyester includes next to skin lines that provide comfort no matter how much one perspires. These fabrics are patented bi-component knit constructions that use different



yarns on either side of the fabric. The brushed inner surface creates many 'touch points' that draw off the moisture. This is then wicked off the skin and through to the outer fabric where it spreads rapidly to aid evaporation. The manufacturers claim that its PowerDry fabrics move 30% more moisture away from the skin than other fabrics. The high UV protection factor makes these fabrics suitable for base layer garments as well as technical shirting worn next-to-skin.

Gonso is a name that one automatically connects to biking, but its underwear ranges can be used for a variety of sports. Nylstar's Meryl

Polypropylene knits are said to give Loeffler's X-Light Man and Lady ranges a soft handle, excellent transpiration and body-flattering stretch.



Skinlife Light - the latest fabric addition to its ranges for both men and women - is bacteria-impeding without destroying the natural bacteria, which the body needs. The 120g-polyamide product has a good textile feel to it, is light in weight and very elastic. The pore construction permits air circulation and moisture transportation for breathability and constant heat insulation of the body. This fabric was developed for next-to-skin wear and Gonso says that it is pleased with the market response.

With the claim 'made for me', Odlo introduced its new image in Munich. The continued growth of the company from a small Nordic sportswear manufacturer to the present day Swiss company has led it to capitalise on the name and the prestige it has earned throughout 46 years of trading. The brand name remains the same and modern technology is present to back it up. Its underwear lines are colour coded for simplicity at point of sale; cool/blue, light/orange, warm/red, X-warm/ruby and serve to underline the uses from summer wares - cool blue, to winter warmth - ruby. Its performance base layer products comprise one material in three different structures. Better ventilation is achieved through mesh, hole and rip structures in the 100% polyester-based fabrics that are so constructed as to prevent showthrough while maintaining transpiration.

The styling of the Odlo underwear, together with the new image colours white, platina, pearl blue and apple, give its presentation to the sporting world a new image and underlines the fun in FUNctional sportswear. 🏃

Kay Turtle

Odlo's COOL garment series offers high MVT as the main comfort factor.

