RISE TO THE CHALLENGE: SCHOELLER TEXTIL AND KLOPMAN

A new fabric range from Klopman for workwear applications contains built-in technical textile functionality from Schoeller Textil.

Quality and innovation meet

Schoeller Textil and German fabric developer Klopman International have launched jointly a new high-performance fabric, synergo, first unveiled at the Techtextil exhibition in Frankfurt in June. Synergo is aimed specifically at the workwear market and is the first joint-product to result from a partnership between the two companies. "

The fabric comes in stretch, soft-shell and laminated options as well as specific developments for use as reinforcements. All fabrics in the range are enhanced with specialised finishing technologies from Schoeller, including 3XDRY (for moisture management), ecorepel or NanoSphere (both for water repellency), and coldblack (for protection against heat and UV rays).

Depending on the end-use requirements, customers can choose between natural stretch options, stretch provided by the use of EME Lycra T400 fibre from Invista, or 2- and 4-way stretch fabrics using high-quality elastane yarns. All are constructed for lasting fit and comfort, the companies have said, based on durable stretch, high-level wash and wear properties as well as a high level of breathability and moisture management. Bonded soft-shell options are suitable for use in jackets as well as in trousers.

At the top of the range, synergo multipro fabrics offer the highest levels of EN-accredited protection for workers who are often exposed to several hazards at the same time, such as from heat and flame or uncontrolled discharge from static build-up. High visibility options certified to EN 471 are also available for extra safety in low-light conditions or other risk areas.

Antonio Gatti, head of the Schoeller business unit that focuses on workwear,



Klopman's Luminex C50, an advanced high-visibility fabric made with Fairtrade certified cotton. For many years, Klopman has specialised in high-quality fabrics in cotton and polyester for the workwear market.

Klopman International

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Schoeller-Works, explains that the Swiss company has been active in this specialist area of the apparel market for more than ten years, producing fabrics for high-end personal protective equipment applications especially.

A first Schoeller-Works collection came to market in 2009. Mr Gatti says this collection is still very much available and that Schoeller is still adding to it, but he says it occurred to him soon after the launch that there could be "an intersection", an overlap between the higher end and the higher-volume, more industrial segment of the workwear market, and that working with a partner could be the best way to service it.

"This is a fragmented market," he explains, "in the same way as the sports market is. The two are very close to one another. In workwear, we have applications for military and police in which there is a big appetite for innovation. And then you have an area in which there is a more industrial focus. Here it's about basic workwear with different characteristics, such as durability, with the requirement that the fabric can be washed 100 times at 75°C."

Not just any partner would do, of course. Schoeller wanted one with a strong reputation for service, quality and consistency. "Klopman delivers all of this," Antonio Gatti says. "We had already had contact with them for a military application for which they licensed some of our technology, so we knew them and we thought a partnership with them could be good for customers. That was the basis for the idea."

Demand for polyester-cotton too

Klopman's sales and marketing director, Holger Beule, says that his company's focus has always been on workwear and protective clothing and that its polyester-cotton fabrics are always of high quality. "We are dedicated to workwear," Mr Beule says. "Yes, ours are basic polyester-cotton products, but they are of very high quality. Workwear is a small proportion of Schoeller's business and it's very specialised and highly innovative. Traditionally, then, Schoeller hasn't supplied the basics and we haven't produced or developed high-end innovative products like theirs. The overlap is there because they have customers who want good-quality polyester-cotton products and we have customers who want innovation."

Synergo is the joint response Klopman and Schoeller have come up with in rising to that challenge.

Mr Gatti agrees that this has been good for both companies. The two organisations will continue to work together, setting up a joint synergo sales force that will aim to meet customer needs at that intersection between the two distinct areas that the companies have focused on until now. This, Mr Gatti says, will be a genuine example of the inspiration behind synergo's name: a synergy between two organisations and a desire to go forward.



Schoeller-Works says reliable protection from heat and flames is now possible in synthetic fabrics that comply with EN directives.

Schoeller

The next big step will be showing off the full collection of fabrics at A+A 2013 in Düsseldorf at the start of November, an exhibition with a much more specific focus on workwear.

Nevertheless, synergo's reception at Techtextil was positive and Mr Gatti says his company and its partner are now in the process of delivering fabrics for potential customers to test. "If the tests prove positive, one year from now we'll have products on the market."

Further down the line, the idea is to widen the range from the current total of 32 articles, with input from both sides as to what might be possible and potentially successful in the market, plus investigating new workwear markets around the world in which synergo fabrics might prove popular.

"It's hard to know how many metres of synergo we will be able to sell," Klopman's Holger Beule says. "These products are still quite expensive because they are technology-driven. Although there are market-research studies, it's hard to say how big the demand is for clothing with functionality such as UV protection or protection from the weather. What we do know is that European Union directives on visibility and safety are making more and more of an influence on companies and that demand for specialist fabrics that can meet those directives is strong. Within that, there are companies who want quality and innovation."

He feels sure that demand for synergo products specifically could easily surpass 500,000 metres of fabric per year. "And to get to a million metres a year would be great," he adds.

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