

Our previous coverage of statements on sustainability from one of the world's more prominent athletic footwear and apparel brands, Puma, makes it imperative for us to bring this update on analysis the brand has carried out on the environmental impact of its shoes.

Perplexed by Puma

On the back of in-house research that highlights the environmental benefits of a new range of products, the outgoing executive chairman of Puma has called for governments to reduce the "antiquated" import duties on synthetic materials to help make these more competitive compared to leather.

Jochen Zeitz said the results of new analysis that compares a new biodegradable shoe (made from materials including organic cotton and linen) and a traditional Puma Suede athletic shoe, "dramatically demonstrate that we have to steadily increase the share of sustainable materials in our collections so that we mitigate not only Puma's but also our consumers' environmental footprint". The cotton and linen shoes are part of a new collection, InCycle, which Puma will launch in February 2013.

The implication of this is that Puma does not regard leather as a sustainable material, which flies in the face of millennia of human experience, scientific research and also of the sustainability strategy of Puma's parent group, PPR. PPR's support of leather remains strong, even if Puma's action plan appears to include eliminating leather as much as possible.

At the end of June, Jochen Zeitz told the *Financial Times*: "We should eat less meat, all of us, and we should use less leather. We all know that cattle and beef are among the biggest contributors to carbon emissions. We have to find alternative ways of producing our raw materials without asking nature to do it for us."

Anyone who sees a disconnect between these comments and the stated strategy of PPR will not have been surprised to learn on October 15 that Jochen Zeitz had announced his resignation as chairman of the administrative board of Puma. He will step down on November 30.

With the help of London-based consultancy Trucost, Puma has calculated that the "environmental cost" of a pair of Suede is €4.29, whereas the environmental cost of the InCycle

The new InCycle Basket shoe, to be launched in February.
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Basket is €2.95. The only breakdown Puma has offered is to outline the contribution it has calculated for greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, water use, land use and waste. The figures for the Puma Suede are, respectively (and in euro), 2.16, 0.74, 0.61, 0.48 and 0.30. The corresponding figures for the InCycle Basket are 1.41, 0.84, 0.49, 0.09 and 0.12. The figures are for the whole shoe, not just the uppers.

We have been in dialogue with Puma and Trucost since they released this information because we believe the figure for the Suede shoe is too high. Our suggestion as to why the number is so high is that, maybe, the Trucost formula failed to take into account that suede is only a part of the material a hide will yield and that the contribution of the suede that goes into a pair of the Suede shoes needs to be shared with a corresponding area of grain leather. It's an opinion, not a statement of fact. Trucost and Puma insist it's incorrect, and say that the figures they have run take into account all stages of the leather supply chain and that their lifecycle analysis uses "robust and comprehensive" factors.

We are perplexed. If the grotesquely high figure of €4.29 really does correspond to the environmental cost of the material for one pair of Puma Suede containing, at most, 2.5 square-feet of suede, what would be the environmental cost of the hide from which those 2.5 square-feet of suede came? A hide from an average-sized North American bovine animal will yield about 48 square-feet of leather. All things being equal, this would give you enough to make 19.2 pairs of shoes (we have calculated on a European size 42). But that would be for the grain side alone. We accept that on the split side, when it comes to making suede, there would probably be more waste and that 19.2 pairs of suede shoes would be unlikely. If we halve it, that would give us 9.6 pairs. The total for the hide would be 28.8 pairs of shoes. To calculate the environmental cost of the hide using the Puma-Trucost methodology, we need to know what proportion of the €4.29 they ascribe to the upper. At the time of going to press on October 24, they have not been able to tell us. We asked them to clarify this point on October 15. If it's 60% or more, which seems likely, the environmental cost of the hide will be greater than the value of one of these North American hides on the open market in October 2012. We also asked Trucost to explain in detail what method it had used to convert the weight of raw material coming into tanneries with the area of finished material coming out the other end. Again, over the same timeframe, it has not been able to share the information with us.

The dialogue continues and we are still trying to understand how the figures can be so high. Trucost and Puma feel their methodology is sound but their explanations so far have left us scratching our heads.



Jochen Zeitz, standing down as executive chairman of Puma.
Puma



Puma Suede, a long-time favourite among footwear fans.
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