BRAND PROFILE: FJÄLLRÄVEN

From the invention of a 14-year-old boy to international sales and a strong presence in the outdoor market, Swedish brand Fjällräven has come a long way from its rural roots.

Nordic beginnings



For 50 years Fjällräven has developed products and materials to withstand the toughest conditions.

Håkan Wike/Fjällräven

Swedish outdoor company Fjällräven celebrated its 50th anniversary last year by launching a limited-edition of its bestselling Kånken daypack. The pack is made of a durable synthetic nylon called Vinylon F, and has an individual serial number on the inside, as well as a dedication from founder, Åke Nordin. Originally developed for school children, the Kånken is a far cry from the very first backpack created by the 14-year-old Åke Nordin for mountain trekking in the 1950s – although it upholds the same principles of practicality and comfort.

The young man from Örnsköldsvik in Northern Sweden did not like the backpacks that were available at that time and decided to see if he could do better. In the shed behind his family's summer cabin, he hammered together a wooden frame, to improve the distribution of weight across the back. On his mother's sewing machine, Mr Nordin made a backpack from strong cotton fabric, which he then attached to the wooden frame using leather straps. He used calfskin to make the support straps. He discovered the bag was not only more

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Fjällräven's classic Greenland Winter Jacket featuring the company's durable G-1000 fabric.

Fjällräven

comfortable to carry, but he could also carry more weight. The backpack frame was the start of Mr Nordin's company, Fjällräven, in 1960. On his first trek in the mountains with his new creation, a Sami asked Mr Nordin to make a backpack for him. The next time Mr Nordin went up to the mountains, the news about his backpack had spread among the reindeer herders, and the idea of starting a company that manufactured modern outdoor equipment started to form.

Ten years after making his first backpack, Mr Nordin founded Fjällräven, naming his company after the Swedish for arctic fox, the small predator which lives in harsh climates in the Swedish mountains.

The first advertisment for Fjällräven appeared in the fourth issue of the Swedish Tourist Association's magazine and said: "Frame, lightweight, tested during three years of winter and summer mountain treks. If you know a Sami or mountain farmer, just ask him how you should carry really heavy packs. Then you will understand the frame's unbeatable properties."

Since its early days as a one-man company in a basement in Örnsköldsvik, Fjällräven has grown to become an established international company synonymous with durable, practical outdoor apparel and equipment. "Even as a young boy, my love of the outdoors encouraged me to improve and develop my own outdoor equipment," said Mr Nordin at the brand's 50th celebrations at the winter ispo fair in 2010. "This backpack frame, the principles of which still apply today, was the start of my company, Fjällräven. Since then, my love for the outdoors has continued to be an inspiration. New types of backpacks, revolutionary sleeping bags and condensation-free, lightweight tents have helped the company grow."

Signature pieces

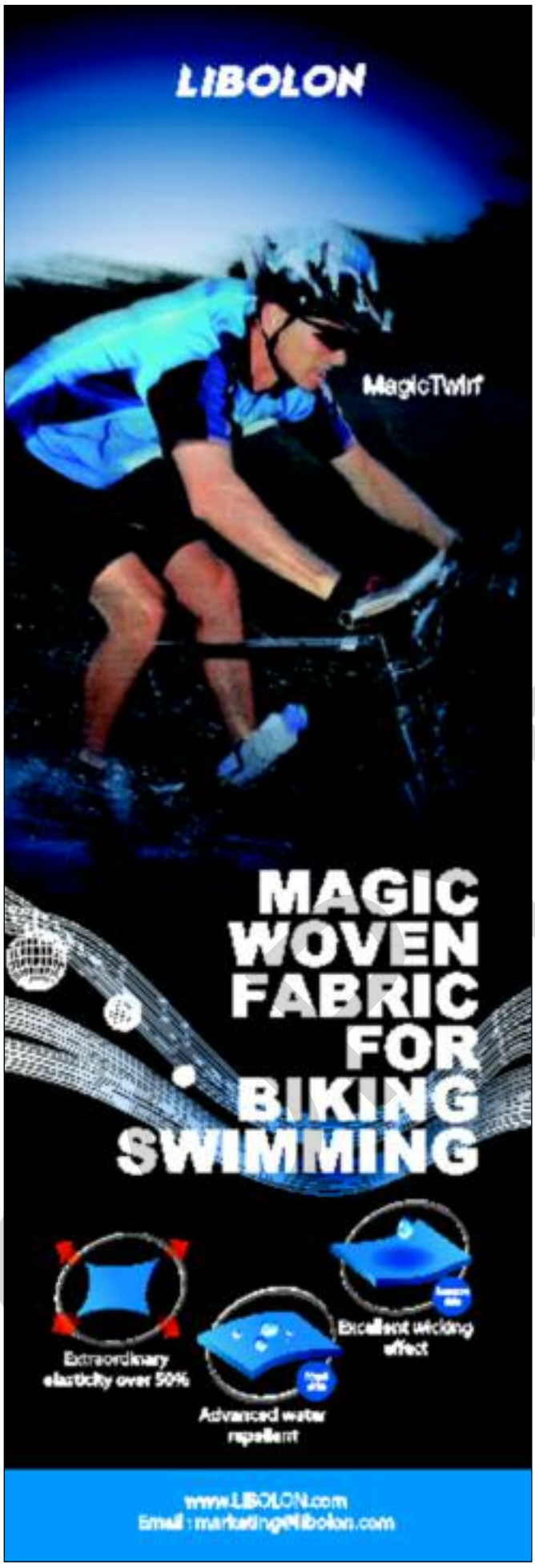
The company's signature fabric, G-1000, is used in jackets and trousers and is made from a blend of 65% polyester and 35% cotton, coated with a thin layer of Greenland Wax. It was developed by Mr Nordin after the 1966 Scandinavian Greenland Expedition as a way of making outdoor clothing more functional. He made a climbing jacket from a specially designed tent fabric that was too heavy for his lightweight tent, and tested it on a trek in the mountains. The fabric seemed to have the properties that Mr Nordin felt were missing from his outdoor clothing. However, it was not water repellent, so Mr Nordin experimented with a blend of beeswax and paraffin that he applied to the fabric using his wife's hairdryer. The experiments paid off, and the wax made the fabric water resistant, windproof and more durable.



Straight backs are happy backs. The Kånken backpack was originally launched in 1978 to spare the backs of school children.

Fjällräven

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The G in the name of the fabric refers to Greenland, as the wax used is Greenland Wax, and Fjällräven launched the jacket in 1968 as the Greenland Jacket. As Fjällräven has innovated alongside other outdoor companies, there are now four variations of G-1000: original, silent, lite and eco.

Fjällräven claims its G-1000 fabric is superior to more technical shell fabrics used by other companies because it is breathable. "The material provides protection from both the wind and light showers while at the same time releasing built-up moisture, so you do not get wet from your own sweat. Compared to membrane garments, G-1000 is also more durable and can withstand many years of hard wear in the outdoors," states the brand.

Another signature Fjällräven piece is the Kånken bag, which, since its introduction in 1978, has sold more than three million packs worldwide. High quality manufacturing and the Vinylon F fabric are the keys to Kånken's success, according to Fjällräven. The light but durable material swells like a natural fibre, thus making the weave more dense when it's raining. This gives the fabric inherent waterproof qualities. The bag also includes a detachable seat to give users somewhere dry to sit while outdoors in snowy or wet weather.

Sustainable aims

In its environmental efforts, Fjällräven has taken several steps towards sustainability. The company has phased out fluorocarbons from all its waterproof garments, and in 2008 launched a line of 'climate-compensated' backpacks – by supporting projects that decrease emissions to offset their own production emissions. Last year, the company expanded this initiative to include all Kajka and Kånken backpacks and all its new 'eco-shell' products.

Earlier this year, Fjällräven launched its Eco-Trail and Eco-Woods jackets featuring its new 'eco-shell' fabric. Eco-shell is made from recycled polyester and is as resistant to wind and rain as traditional multi-layer fabrics, the company claims. In March this year, however, the company had to withdraw the new jackets from the market as they had a production error. A statement from the company reads: "On the left side of the jacket, the mesh fabric has been sewn into the water protective taped seams. This could cause the jacket to leak when under heavy pressure. This is a problem that was not present in samples throughout the development process. Due to this error we have decided to stop delivery and are now recalling Eco-Trail and Eco-Woods jackets from the market." At the time of going to print, the jackets are due to be launched this September.

Donna Bruns, product manager at Fjällräven, said of the fault: "At Fjällräven we are proud of our reputation of developing durable, functional and timeless equipment. Unfortunately manufacturing errors can occur but we are diligent in taking responsibility if they should occur. We have full respect that this delay might cause problems for both our customers and end users who, just as us, have been looking forward to the launch of the Eco-Shell Series."

The Fjällräven brand is owned by Sweden-based Fenix Outdoor, which also owns outdoor brand Hanwag. Consolidated net sales for the group in 2010 amounted to about $211 million with a profit before tax of $37.2 million.

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