BRAND PROFILE: REGATTA

According to the Regatta group, getting outdoors is all about enjoyment. As a result, the products it makes are designed to provide the necessary technical support as well as being fun to wear.

Fun for all the family

The image the Regatta group evokes is one of outdoor family fun and adventure. Set up in England more than 80 years ago by the Black family (not to be confused with Blacks), the group now comprises four brands: Regatta, Craghoppers, Dare 2b and Hawkshead. Each has its own distinct objectives and style, but the shared vision is to provide good quality and affordable clothing, footwear and accessories so ordinary people can enjoy getting out in the open air.

The firm originally produced military and corporate wear and has always specialised in producing waterproof garments. However, its founders saw a niche in the outdoor market that was not really being serviced and decided to have a go at filling it. Outdoor performance wear provider Regatta remains the group's flagship brand and has been going the longest, since 1981. Meanwhile, Dare 2b is a mountain sports brand, Craghoppers is a travel-oriented brand and Hawkshead focuses on casual and countryside wear.

Making life easier

Although outdoor activities are far from being a new invention, Dare 2b's managing director, Graham Rickard, points out that, until fairly recently, outdoor brands simply didn't exist. While hiking, climbing and other outdoor pursuits have always been "massive", particularly in Europe, he says that people simply didn't see the need to buy different products for these activities from the ones they used in normal life. Nevertheless, people soon started to realise that new technologies were being developed to make these activities more pleasurable and demand for more advanced products soon started to take off.

According to Mr Rickard, more people are getting involved in outdoor activities because they offer really good health benefits for the family but can still be relatively low impact. And, while some brands price people out of their ranges, or design ranges that are so technical they are really aimed at outdoor experts,



Regatta prides itself on providing good quality and affordable apparel and accessories so that the whole family can enjoy getting out in the open air.

Regatta Great Outdoors

Regatta's aim is to equip normal people who want to enjoy a good walk, mountain climb, or other outdoor activity. "Regatta fits right into that. It is family-owned, welcoming and non-exclusive," he says.

Based in the UK, inclement weather has always been an important concern for the group. Keeping people warm, dry and comfortable have been priorities right from the start and rainwear, in particular, has been one of its strongest sellers over the years. Its Isotex family of waterproof and breathable fabrics, for example, is said to offer outstanding comfort and performance across a range of lightweight, packable rainshells. Another really important current priority for the company is stretch to allow real freedom of movement. Many of its jackets feature a two-way stretch panel in the back so that when the wearer moves the jacket moves with them.

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"The trick with Regatta is to take top-end technologies and make them accessible," says Mr Rickard. This includes a wide range of features including waterproofing, breathability and stretch. "Everyone appreciates it," he adds. Adding special zones for venting, for example, can help to improve wearer comfort. And attention to detail is really important for the firm. Reinforced peaks in hoods, making products adjustable, and adding handy grips on zips are just some of the small touches that make its garments more appealing. "The amount of engineering in the products is phenomenal," he says.

Getting it right

According to the Regatta group, providing reliable product is important, but it is not enough on its own to give it staying power. One consideration it takes seriously is pricing. Mr Rickard points out that, if a family of five want to get active and each has to buy a jacket costing £200, the initial outlay can be substantial. Add walking boots and other accessories and many families will simply be unable to fund their hobby. Then there is the added consideration that different equipment is often needed for different activities.

"The trick is to bring technology and realistic price together," says Mr Rickard. He explains that volume is one of the firm's major strengths. It sold 11 million products globally last year alone, which he puts down to reasonable pricing and trust in the brand. "The quality is astounding compared with so-called more technical products," claims Mr Rickard.

Most of the technology used in the company's ranges is developed in-house. The firm makes an effort to respond to consumer and retail feedback so that it is providing the right products for the right market. Furthermore, it works alongside various athletes when it comes to developing new technologies. According to Mr Rickard, Steve Howe has been giving the company technical advice about product development and adaptations for the Regatta brand. Mr Howe works with the Outward Bound Trust, which uses outdoor experiences and challenges to help and develop young people, and is a professionally qualified mountaineering instructor. Olympic skier Alain Baxter performs the same function at Dare 2b.

Meanwhile, the group has also tried to incorporate fashion into its functional collections. There are various ways of doing this, according to the company, including the use of strong colours and prints. Fit and length are really important in terms of style and using popular fabrics such as soft shell are essential. Mr Rickard says: "You can fuse strong style with outdoor themes; there's no reason why outdoor shouldn't be a joy to wear." He says small details such as stencilling are really strong at the moment, and can offer technical benefits such as reflectivity. "If people feel good, you sell more; fashion and function both matter," he says, adding that the garment must also have "hanger appeal".

Taking responsibility

Like many outdoor companies, the Regatta group is also extremely concerned about preserving the environment. However, it recognises that environmental responsibility is far from being a straightforward issue. Unlike some companies who pride themselves on being eco-friendly or sustainable because one aspect of their production processes fit these descriptions, the company is interested in the bigger picture. "Environment is a big question for us. We need to be realistic, to identify where we can make a difference," says Mr Rickard.

While the firm is certainly becoming more efficient in many areas, it admits its energy usage could be better. "We have to understand what we do and try to minimise that," Mr Rickard says. "It's a complicated world; it's about finding a balance. Having a sustainable story isn't enough on its own." The company is currently working on implementing REACH [chemical] guidelines and on using sustainable materials more frequently in its collections. One example is carbon bamboo, which has a range of technical benefits, comes from a sustainable source, is inherently anti-microbial and is "really nice to wear".



Dare 2b is one of the four Regatta group brands. It focuses on a range of mountain sports including skiing and cycling.

Regatta Great Outdoors

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Regatta's Offset t-shirt for women is made from lightweight carbon bamboo fabric, which is from a sustainable source and offers natural anti-bacterial properties.

Regatta Great Outdoors

One area the firm feels it has excelled is in providing products that last. "They rarely wear out," Mr Rickard explains. Although people buy new products because they want a new style, or because a new technology has been introduced, each of the four brands aims to provide real durability. According to the group's PR manager, Gill Russell, customers often come in asking for the same jacket they bought 20 years ago because something minor has gone wrong with it. "They go many miles further than ordinary shoes and clothes," says Mr Rickard.

However, while environmental awareness is important, it is not the only area of social responsibility the Regatta group is working on. It has a firm ethical trading policy designed to ensure all of its factories are complying fully with its ethical sourcing standards. It is committed to carrying out surveys for each supplier or factory and analysing where improvements need to be made. "As a minimum we expect our suppliers to meet the legal requirements of their country," says chairman and chief executive, Keith Black. "All our suppliers must provide a safe and clean working environment, pay a living wage, not impose excessive working hours and not use child labour. We believe that providing value and quality for customers should not be at the expense of workers in our supply chain."

The company believes the secret to its success is the trustworthiness of its products and of the group itself. According to Mr Rickard, Regatta has 65% brand recognition in the UK and the firm is working on improving this further afield. It is currently sold in 36 countries across the globe. Furthermore, Mr Rickard believes things can only get better, partly as a result of the economic downturn. "Recession is really good news," he says. "Our group of companies has grown in every recession!" As more people choose outdoor holidays over exotic overseas holidays, and with people looking for more affordable outdoor apparel, footwear and equipment, the Regatta group is really optimistic about its future.

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