

## BRAND PROFILE: HAGLÖFS

The Swedish outdoor brand has set its sustainability bar high so there can be no accusations of greenwashing, and has introduced a set of criteria for footwear to carry its Take Care label.

# Haglöfs extends sustainability aims

**S**cooping an Outdoor Industry Award at OutDoor Friedrichshafen for its latest mountaineering concept, Swedish brand Haglöfs is aiming high. The ROC Helios 25 backpack is part of a new Mountain Ultimate concept that has been in development for a number of years and has minimalism at its core. "It goes to great lengths to meet the needs of people who want to prioritise speed in their climbing," it explains.

The company that celebrated its 100th anniversary last year is also going to great lengths to increase its visibility and, in the same vein as German brand Vaude, aims to be a "leader in sustainability" in the outdoor sector, a path it embarked on in 2008 with an overhaul of products and processes and something it now feels confident to promote.

Last November, it launched its Take Care label for clothing. For a product to qualify it must be bluesign approved, made with 50% or more recycled content or made from organic cotton. About 60% of the company's products were marked with the symbol for autumn/winter 2014, and this has increased to 75% for autumn/winter 2015.

"It's not really a label, it's a communication tool for making it easier for end consumers to make sustainable choices in shops," Haglöfs' sustainability director, Lennart Ekberg, tells us. "That's been one of the biggest problems: there are a lot of companies with sustainable inputs in their products but it's extremely difficult for the end consumer to find them. We also wanted to put a really high standard on what demands we have for the products to fit into the Take Care label, otherwise we could be accused of greenwashing."

After positive feedback from retailers, Haglöfs has decided to extend the concept to its footwear. Starting with the autumn-winter 2016 collections, for shoes to make the Take Care grade, they must either be made of 'sustainable leather' or contain a bluesign-approved or recycled material.



*The Take Care label is an indication of products made with greener processes.*

 Haglöfs

## Leather standard

The company recently joined multi-stakeholder body the Leather Working Group, which was established in 2005 by footwear brands, tanneries and retailers to audit tanneries on environmental performance and rate them as gold, silver or bronze (or fail). There are more than 160 tanners from 21 countries participating in the programme. Haglöfs says it will transition to exclusively sourcing sustainable leather from gold-rated tanneries – the standard it classes as 'sustainable leather'.

"It's not hard to source from only gold-rated tanneries, we have already done that for some time," says Mr Ekberg. "For spring 2016 we have a couple of issues with leather from gold-rated tanneries, but it's not that difficult."

Haglöfs' target is stricter than most. Timberland and adidas aim to source from only silver or gold-rated tanneries but many brands say a successful LWG audit is enough. Puma sources from gold, silver or bronze and Vans is

"following [sister brand] Timberland's lead" and a quarter of its leather in 2013 was from an LWG-rated supplier.

For tanneries to receive and maintain gold status, they must prove that they are continuously improving, and must be reaudited every 18 months. Some tanners have suggested it can be costly and tricky, particularly as tighter standards came into effect last year. In some cases, tanneries drop down a status while they work to fix issues, or are temporarily unclassified. Whether or not this would mean Haglöfs would change supplier is unclear.

"The Take Care standard for footwear was only settled in spring before OutDoor Friedrichshafen," explains Mr Ekberg. "We are currently

looking over our leather supply chain, so if we need to make some changes, we will."

### Recycled shoe parts

For the non-leather products or elements in the shoes to be part of the Take Care collection, at least 70% of the upper needs to be made of a bluesign-approved or recycled material, and the midsole or outsole must contain either bio-based or recycled material. Bluesign is a Swiss audit company that uses Input Stream Management to vet production processes and inputs. To obtain approval, a material must be free from harmful substances; manufacturers must minimise harmful emissions to water, soil and air from production processes, monitor and

*The Swedish brand started life as a backpack specialist and now turns over \$82.5m.*

 Haglöfs



reduce resources, and ensure working conditions meet health and safety requirements.

Haglöfs is unable to cover all its needs with bluesign materials, but has been working to get suppliers to improve their manufacturing production so that they are able to supply bluesign approved material. This has varying degrees of difficulty depending on the supplier's location. Some countries have an industry with clear vertical integration, where there are short distances between those who spin and weave fabric and those who finish it. In other countries the distances are greater and becoming a bluesign partner is then a more complex process.

In November 2014, Haglöfs said 40% of its footwear products were to be made with recycled materials from this year. Mr Ekberg admits sourcing these kinds of product for footwear will prove more difficult than on the apparel side. "Sourcing recycled materials for footwear is a bit more difficult," he says, "and the same with bluesign-approved textile footwear materials; they are a lot more difficult to source."

Fewer footwear materials manufacturers go through the bluesign approval process, which can be costly for companies, especially if they consider that there is insufficient demand.

In its 2013 sustainability report, it stated that from the 2016 season, all products were to be developed as Take Care products and anything else would be the exception. The follow-up report in 2014 doesn't set such targets, instead stating that 65% of its apparel products were bluesign approved and 75% carry the Take Care label. The limitations further back up the supply chain make meeting targets difficult.

"There's no end consumer who wants to have a functionally inferior product just because it's sustainable," adds Mr Ekberg, "so we are closely following the technical developments and if there are possibilities to use some of these sustainable developments in our products we are doing that, but without making the product functionally inferior, that's extremely important."

The company completed the phasing out of C8 technology as a water-repellent treatment in spring 2014 (PFCs, which are thought to be harmful, appear in small quantities as a by-product of the synthesis that takes place in the making of C8 chemicals), and signed up to use Organoclick's fluorocarbon-free product. "We are involved in a lot of research projects so we know what's possible and not possible, what's good or not good, and commercially available. For that reason it's difficult to have a timeline or target in terms of percentages, so we say we have a clear ambition to improve every year."

The sustainability aims extend to employee welfare, which is "at least equally important", and factories – both apparel and footwear – are vetted through Fair Wear audits, which monitor



pay and conditions. By the end of last year, 86% of production volume had been audited, close to its target of 90%.

### Growth story

With the arrival of CEO Peter Fabrin last November came a series of senior appointments and an even greater focus on strengthening relationships with customers and consumers "to ultimately take Haglöfs from being a good company to becoming an exceptionally great company".

The brand has come a long way from the backpack maker established in a small Swedish town in 1914 with a handful of employees. When Mr Ekberg joined in 1989 as a designer he helped to grow the product range and, by the early 2000s, clothing had overtaken backpacks as the main driver behind the brand's development. The company was bought by a private equity firm and subsequently by Japanese group Asics, which helped it develop its footwear ranges.

Haglöfs has been growing at around 9% over the last few years, sells into 26 markets, directly employs 200 and has an annual turnover of \$82.5 million.

"We are now often an advisory party to others with whom we initially sought contact with to learn from, from authorities to standard-setting organisations," adds Mr Ekberg. "In future, sustainability will be a prerequisite for doing business. We are well positioned, but we still have more we want to achieve."

*Barken boot. The aim is for around 40% of footwear to carry the Take Care label to begin with.*

 Haglöfs