RISE TO THE CHALLENGE: REPREVE AND EAGLE'S NEST OUTFITTERS

A self-inflating airbed has given Unifi a new application for its Repreve recycled polyester fibre and its partner ENO an opportunity to enhance the sustainability credentials of its newest product.

Something in the air

Lost famous for hammocks, outdoor brand Eagle's Nest Outfitters (ENO) has decided to branch out and launch a new, self-inflating sofa or air-bed that the company believes will be popular with the followers it already has among campers and festival-goers. One version of the new product, the Billow Air Lounge, will soon become available with a high-level of Repreve post consumer-use recycled polyester in the fabric mix. Initially, this version will contain 45% Repreve and 55% nylon, but the maker of Repreve, Unifi, says its customer wants to bring out a 100% Repreve version further down the road.

The two partners insist the Billow Air Lounge will be the only inflatable lounger on the market that is made from recycled plastic water bottles. In this way, ENO will join a roster of a number of well-known brands that use Repreve to help make their products better for the environment. "We are delighted to work with Repreve," says Lane Nakaji, general manager of ENO. "With the new Billow Air Lounge, we are providing



The self-inflating Air Billow Lounge, perfect for outdoor enthusiasts to sit in or sleep on, represents a new product category for hammock specialists Eagle's Nest Outfitters.

ENO

individuals with a comfortable relaxation option for enjoying the outdoors, and we take it one step further by using eco-friendly materials like Repreve that also honour the environment that they love."

Key features of the lounger include triple-stitched nylon and dual-layer construction for enhanced durability. The Billow Air Lounge is portable and, according to ENO, "intelligently constructed"; it comes with a custom carrying case and stakes, and when not in use, packs to a conveniently small size of less than 75 centimetres long. When inflated, the lounger is comfortably sized at just over two metres long.

"ENO is a highly respected brand in the outdoor industry, and we're honoured that they've chosen to use Repreve in the new Billow Air Lounge," says Jay Hertwig, vice-president of global brand sales, marketing and product development for Unifi. "We believe this partnership will broaden the platform to empower consumers to choose the recycling bin instead of the trash can, and increase understanding of what can be created from water bottles when they are recycled."

Replacement strategy

Unifi's global marketing manager, Christine Spiegel, says a sample Billow Air Lounge that her company had on display at Outdoor Retailer Summer Market in August attracted a lot of attention. "Repreve is already in use in backpacks, socks, headwear, insulation, trim, carpets and so on. We also offer it as a staple fibre. This is an extension into a new category," she says, "and that's a good thing because what we want is for Repreve to replace PET in every form in which it can exist. We're almost there with our plans to have our own plastic bottle processing plant and full backward integration. We're aiming for go-live in September."

16 bottles each

ENO marketing manager, Amy Allison, explains that each Repreve Billow Air Lounge product contains 16 bottles' worth of recycled polyester. A non-Repreve version launches in September, but the one ENO has worked on with Unifi will go on sale in stores run by outdoor co-operative group REI at the start of 2017. She says the brand is always searching for ways to become more sustainable; it's part of the fabric of the company. Its founders are two brothers, Peter and Paul Pinholster, who started out in 1999 in Florida with little more than a desire to run a business that suited their lifestyle and what they refer to as a "ramshackle minivan". They lived and worked in the van, making hammocks and travelling the length of the East Coast of the US selling their products at music festivals and constructing more when the small volume of stock ran out.

When they tired of life on the road, they settled down in Asheville, North Carolina, to a marginally more mainstream manufacturing life, adding bags and bug-protection products to their range and establishing Eagle's Nest as a solid supplier to REI while building up its own online sales too. At the start of 2015, REI named the company as its vendor partner of the year, describing ENO as being "the consummate partner" and as having "redefined the hammock category".

Particular about fabric

No company achieves accolades of this kind from REI without offering excellent service and high levels of product quality, which in the case of hammocks or a product such as the Billow Air Lounge means high-quality material too. ENO pays close attention to quality, touch and



The Repreve Billow Air Lounge will be available from the start of 2017 in various colour combinations.

ENO/Unifi

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Repreve

Using Repreve recycled polyester from Unifi gives ENO the chance to make its new product line more sustainable. Bottles become chips, chips become yarn, yarn becomes fabric and fabric becomes finished products. This image illustrates how the company promotes the recycling process.

cost of all the material it puts into its products. "We're really particular about fabric," Amy Allison explains, "and we're particular about partners." She adds that Unifi has met all these needs while enhancing ENO's sustainability story too, both through the work it has done to develop a closed-loop system for recycled polyester fibres and through being (based 275 kilometres away in Greensboro, North Carolina) a relatively near neighbour.

The need for transparency

At Unifi, Christine Spiegel explains that her company believed from the outset in having a closed-loop set-up; it's a way of making sure it can have the high quality of chips it requires to make Repreve. Closed-loop will also give greater transparency in the supply chain, offering ENO and other brands who work with Unifi confidence that the polyester they are using really has come from post-consumer-use plastic bottles and that they really are helping keep bottles out of landfill and out of the oceans of the world. "We're certified, and we can test the product at every level." Christine Spiegel says, "That's why brands work with us; we live up to what we say." She says there have been instances of brands specifying Repreve in the fabrics they use only for supply chain partners elsewhere to let them down by cutting corners and using standard polyester instead. Unifi's tests will flag this up. "Recycled polyester is going to become the norm," she insists. "And you just have to look at what the big soft drinks companies are doing to see that we are not about to run out of plastic bottles any time soon. But at the same time the need for transparency in the recycled polyester supply chain is going to become greater."



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