

*Bayern Munich was the first team to wear the adidas x parley jerseys.*

*adidas*

## RISE TO THE CHALLENGE: ADIDAS AND FENC

As adidas extends its use of recycled ocean plastic into performance products, the relationship it has with Taiwanese company FENC looks set to become even more important.

# Taiwanese partner helps adidas make waves

On November 5, 2016, German football giants FC Bayern Munich took to the pitch at their Allianz Arena stadium for a match against TSG 1899 Hoffenheim. Amidst the usual plethora of world class players and an atmosphere worthy of their talents, there was a key difference as they stepped out on the turf: the Bayern players wore a jersey made from rubbish. No, the standards of kit manufacturer adidas have not slipped, rather it is the next stage of a partnership with campaign group Parley for the Oceans, which has seen the brand use yarns derived from recovered ocean plastic in its products.

Parley was founded in 2012 to raise awareness about the dangers posed both to animals and humans by plastic waste in the oceans. The organisation aims to go beyond making people aware of the problem; it also wants to present solutions. The collaboration with adidas, which originated in 2015, was born out of this desire. Cyrill Gutsch, founder of Parley, says it chose adidas as a partner because it is a brand that "redefines the rules". The first product that the venture generated was a 3D printed concept shoe, which had an upper made entirely from yarns and filaments that are reclaimed and recycled from ocean waste.




*adidas has been working with Parley since 2015.*

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### Beyond prototypes

"This represents another step on the journey of adidas and Parley for the Oceans," said Eric Liedtke, board member responsible for global brands at adidas, as it unveiled the first performance apparel products made from ocean plastic. "We have not only managed to make footwear from recycled ocean plastic, but have also created the first jersey coming 100% out of the ocean," he added.

The jerseys worn by Bayern Munich's players, as well as those worn by Real Madrid in their match with Sporting Gijon on last November, were made using upcycled marine debris collected by Parley as part of interception and clean-up operations in coastal areas of the Maldives. They also incorporate illegal deep-sea gillnets retrieved by Parley's partner organisation Sea Shepherd. To make the jerseys more sustainable, adidas used water-based environmentally friendly prints, and the clubs and sponsors agreed that their logos could be faded.

The brand also launched the UltraBoost Uncaged Parley running shoe, which is the first mass production footwear to be created using ocean waste. It features a knitted upper made from 95% recycled ocean plastic, with the remaining 5% recycled polyester. The rest of the shoe, including the heel, lining and laces, is also made from recycled materials. It made 7,000 pairs available to customers from last November and has committed to releasing one million by the end of this year. Each pair uses 11 plastic bottles, so this target would see the retrieval of 11 million bottles from coastal areas as part of the Parley Global Clean-up Network. To mark World Oceans Day in June, it offered a limited-edition 50 pairs to social media users who could demonstrate a commitment to stopping their consumption of single-use plastic items.

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*adidas says it will produce one million pairs of the shoe by the end of 2017.*

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## Crucial cog

Parley collects the waste and adidas manufactures the final products, but the crucial task of converting the recovered plastic into a usable material is in the hands of Taiwanese textile manufacturer Far Eastern New Century (FENC). Jeffrey Hsu, deputy manager in charge of marketing and partnerships at FENC's research and development centre, explains to *WSA* that it did the "technology portion" of the process. Adidas sends the bales of ocean waste to Oriental Resource Development, a subsidiary of FENC, where it is converted into polyester flakes. FENC then takes over and turns them into chips and then into high-quality yarns, which are used to knit the upper of the shoe or the football jersey.

Mr Hsu says adidas approached FENC with a potential source of material, ocean plastic; the sports brand was unsure as to whether it was feasible to use this in its products. FENC did some research and came up with a solution. He reveals that the process is "not based on any new technology in terms of conversion", rather FENC needed to work out how to make it work "logistically". A key part of this was showing the brand how to better package the waste. This helped the brand move from eight tonnes of loosely packaged material in its first container to a more efficiently packed 30 tonnes in the next. FENC's aim was to make the process "sustainable in a business sense" as well as environmentally.

"We leveraged our strongest asset, vertical integration, for the recycling process. It's complicated work but we took on the challenge," adds Eric Huang, vice-president of FENC's filament division. The Taiwanese company reported last October that it had been presented with a sustainability award by adidas in recognition of its work on the project.

Mr Hsu highlights the importance of collaborative efforts on ventures such as this. "Unless there are partnerships, where both the brand and the supplier have a common mindset in their approach to the common goal, it's never going to work," he says, adding that the "producer needs to have the same level of commitment towards sustainability, regardless of the brand". He predicts that post-consumer garment and textile recycling will be the "next wave" in sustainability due to the volume of waste being generated. He believes this will result in more use of post-consumer recycled polyester yarn.

## Still work to do

After announcing the release of the performance products, Mr Liedtke stressed that adidas "won't stop there". He explained that the "ultimate ambition" is to eliminate virgin plastics from its supply chain. As part of its 2020 sustainability strategy, it is targeting the removal of plastic bags from all global retail stores. A switch to paper bags began in last April; the company believes this will eliminate around 70 million plastic bags each year. Approximately three million of these will be in the US with a further two million in Germany.

Parley shares Mr Hsu's belief that partnerships are the key to successfully reaching a goal, which in its case is ridding the oceans of plastic pollution. "Nobody can solve this alone," it says. "At this point, it's no longer just about raising awareness," warns Mr Gutsch. "It's about taking action and implementing strategies that can end the cycle of plastic pollution for good." FENC and adidas will have a key part to play if this target is to be met.

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