## BRAND PROFILE: TETON BROS

Japanese apparel brand Teton Bros is on a mission to help outdoor enthusiasts overcome the most challenging conditions on the planet.

# Teton takes on Mother Nature

Founder of Japanese outdoor apparel brand Teton Bros, Nori Suzuki, is an accomplished mountaineer and an all-round extreme activity enthusiast. His love of the great outdoors took him to the US, where he spent two decades testing his limits and honing his skills in a range of sports, including off-piste skiing (known as backcountry skiing in the US), mountain climbing and rafting. Inspired by this adventure, he returned to Japan and began work on garments designed to cope with extreme climatic conditions. In 2007, he founded Teton Bros; it takes its name from the Teton mountain range, which flanks one side of the Jackson Hole valley in Wyoming, where Mr Suzuki spent a considerable amount of his time while in the US.

Initial product development was targeted at mountain guides, but it now offers a range of items, which it states "address the needs of alpinists, backcountry skiers and everyday enthusiasts". This includes technical shells, insulated jackets and baselayers. Its core line is for adventurous skiers who seek out the challenges posed by off-piste and powder skiing. It also offers more lightweight and compact items for trekking and an alpine range of apparel for prolonged use at up to 7,000 metres above sea level. "The difference between our apparel and other brands is not so much the design, but rather its functions," explains Junko Suzuki, co-founder of Teton. She emphasises that a product's intended use is always the starting point in the design process.

### Attention to detail

Teton's flagship product was the TB Jacket. "We wanted to create something functional and practical to use in real-life situations on a mountain," Mr Suzuki says of the product, which he first designed in 2008, drawing on his experience skiing in the Teton mountains. It was released in 2009 after what the company describes as "a lot of twists and turns".



*Founder Nori Suzuki plays an active role in both the design and testing of products.*

Teton Bros

He has always insisted on playing an active role in the testing of all new products; he believes the only way to ensure they meet his exacting standards is to try them out himself. The company reveals he spends an "enormous amount of time in miserable conditions testing a variety of prototype garments". This includes remote mountain villages, where the environment is treacherous and the climate unpredictable. "We choose a place where we can test under severe conditions," he says. He also calls on the expertise of experienced mountain guides, skiers and ski patrol officers when the products are in their prototype phase. The feedback they give him is "essential", he insists, and it helps the brand to decide what improvements are needed before a garment is ready to be sold to customers. Each round of testing, and the subsequent modifications it inspires, bring the product closer to what the founder is searching for, with the cycle

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***Teton's products are put through their paces by experienced mountain guides, skiers and ski patrol officers.***

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*Polartec created two new versions of its Neoshell fabric for the TB 2.0 Jacket.*

Teton Bros

repeating until he deems it is the best it can possibly be. "The key to ensuring we maintain our vision at all times is field trials and testing with professionals in the field," he emphasises.

The brand also takes a great deal of care when selecting fabrics, taking into account properties such as weight and tear resistance, along with the more obvious performance functions of waterproofness and breathability. "The fabrics are carefully selected for the garment's technical purpose," Mr Suzuki says.

## Trusted partner

A desire to find the perfect fabric for its TB Jacket led Teton to the door of textile manufacturer Polartec. The brand says it was "natural" to work with the US company on its flagship product. Polartec's breathable and waterproof Neoshell fabric, which was launched in 2010, in particular ticked many of Teton's boxes. The key to its functional performance is an ultra-thin polyurethane membrane that allows the fabric to breathe in all conditions, rather than requiring heat and pressure to build up inside the garment before it starts to breathe. Polartec says it has "optimal pore size and placement", allowing air permeability of two litres per square-metre per second. According to Teton, Neoshell "dramatically improves the environment inside the garment", satisfying its aim to make clothing that can be used for highly aerobic activities.

As with all Teton products, the TB Jacket is a constant work in progress. An updated version, the TB 2.0 Jacket, features new versions of Neoshell, which were specially designed for the brand by Polartec. It came about after Nori Suzuki laid down a challenge to Polartec: could it create a more breathable, stretchier and suppler version of Neoshell without compromising on durability? What followed was a collaborative effort between material scientists at Polartec and Teton's core group of mountain guides and designers; Teton called the project "the search for Kinobi". Kinobi is a Japanese term meaning functional beauty, the search for which represents one of the brand's guiding principles. The jacket was the result of a desire to create a simple, elegant garment that could also offer the level of performance required from an outdoor product. Polartec says the new Neoshell fabrics have "an unprecedented combination of supple stretch, breathability and overall comfort". The fabrics were field tested by representatives from both companies in the remote Japanese mountain village of Hineomate, chosen because of its isolated location and the extreme environment that surrounds it.

The body of the TB 2.0 Jacket features a 70-by-160 denier stretch-nylon, woven Neoshell fabric, which allows the wearer to have greater core mobility. A durable, abrasion-resistant face Neoshell fabric is used on the shoulder and waist. Both are paired with a fine-gauge circular-knit textile on the interior that is softer, stretchier and less prone to snagging than traditional tricot waterproof fabric lining, the companies claim. Mr Suzuki, who tested the jacket himself, describes it as "like wearing air". Teton added a fully adjustable hood to shut out rain and snow, sew-free bonding and advanced seam-taping to eliminate stitch exposure and increase durability, and wide sleeves to fit easily over insulation layers and gloves.

Teton chose the mountain lion as its logo because of the resilience the animal shows when faced with the harshness of nature, a quality which it hopes its products can emulate. A Japanese calligraphy pen called a Fude was used to draw the logo, a nod to the brand's heritage. Led by its hands-on founder, Teton has come a long way in its first decade. With the help of Polartec, it will have a strong chance of scaling any peaks that lie ahead.

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