News items don't always provide a full picture: for instance, what was the thinking behind the Sensitive Wearing Concept or B3 SWC collection launched earlier this year, bringing Eurojersey and Lanificio Becagli together.

Adapting a product to fit the specific

Since Eurojersey launched its warp-knit Sensitive fabics in 1993, it has succeeded in making its mark as the only patented fabric in the swimwear and underwear markets. Recently, working with partners such as Framis in Italy and Bemis in the USA, who produce hot-melt tapes for seam-sealing, Eurojersey has been able to make a new claim for Sensitive, namely that it can provide 'the technical alternative to seamless technology', perfectly suited as it is to laser-cutting and the production of minimalist garments with few hems or edges.

Sensitive's exceptional lightness (50% lighter than ordinary polyamide or Lycra fabrics), maximum breathability, 4-way stretch and resistance to UV, chlorine and abrasion, along with its easy care and non-pilling properties, make it perfectly suited for first and second layer sports garments. Andrea Crespi, Eurojersey's export manager, stated that, nevertheless, the company was convinced Sensitive had much greater potential in the technical sportswear market. "Pressure from the fashion world and the growing involvement and interest of women in sport has led to greater demand for super-light, breathable garments that ensure maximum well-being. This means they need to be comfortable, suitable for physical activity, hard-wearing, provide protection from external environments," he says, "and be easy to care for, as well as stylish, well-fitting and fashionable - perfect for wearing after sport too."

The solution was found in an ambitious partnership with another Italian knitter recognised for its flair, stylishness and technology, whose product and know-how was complementary, Prato-based Lanificio Becagli.

Re-engineering the product

Originally established in the late 1950s, Becagli has come a long way since it began to specialise in fleece and pile fabrics in the 1980s.



Garments in Sensitive fabrics of the Tecmosphere project by Gonso.

Gonso

The company began a major reorganisation of its product lines a few years ago, and at the February 2005 ispo presented its new sports division called B3, focusing on layering technology with a collection divided into four groups: B3.bsc for traditional fleeces with anti-pilling treatment, B3.md for second layer fabrics with greater thermal insulating properties and breathability, B3.knit that the company calls advanced knit fabrics, with micro-porous membrane and optional Teflon treatment, and B3.xst for protection layer fabrics, which include softshell fabrics with the company's 'Flecsa package', which offers a choice of state-of-the-art membranes depending on the performance requirements, MTP foam, etc. The latest addition is the new B3 SWC, a line of bonded fabrics developed with Eurojersey and presented by both companies at ispo as a 'technical and functional alternative to traditional soft shell fabrics'.

"We are specialists in bonding technology and technical fleeces and knits, and have developed a highly flexible system for combining Sensitive in all manner of different ways with our fleeces and/or a high-stretch, high-tech membrane," says Luigi Marini, in charge of product design and development at Lanificio Becagli. Even the products with the lowest performance properties could be classed as technical, while the top-end satisfies the most demanding requirements thanks to the high flexibility of the fabrics' weight /performance ratio.

From fabric to concept

Because of the complexity of the range's possibilities the two companies offer guidance to customers as to how best to use these fabrics. The collection for the moment has between 15 and 20 different articles including summer fabrics which bond two layers of Sensitive Plus around a cutting edge stretch membrane that increases the fabric's elasticity and provides extra wind- and water-proofing. The winter fabrics in the range include combinations of Sensitive Plus with a single- or two-directional stretch fur fabric in different thicknesses or with a pure or blended wool lining and stretch membrane. In the words of Andrea Crespi, "these fabrics are ideal for creating truly technical garments with great aesthetics. There is no end to what people are going to be able to do with them, but we have to give them the benefit of our knowledge of the product, it's such a new concept."

Becagli already had an in-house team developing prototypes to inspire the sports brands, and is now actively working on specific developments and designs. It is anticipated that there will be some ultra-light, ultra-protective golf trousers walking the fairways in the near future, and some of the ski brands are not far behind.