

NEWCOMERS: CASTORE

UK-based brand Castore has already raised significant funding as it seeks to provide a premium alternative to the leading names of the sportswear market. Securing the support of tennis star Andy Murray can't do any harm to its chances of achieving this goal.

Castore takes aim at sportswear sector

The motto of Liverpool-based sportswear brand, Castore, is 'Better Never Stops', the meaning of which is two-fold. Of course, it represents the company's desire to continually improve, whether that be through the materials it uses, the techniques it employs during manufacturing, or the breadth of its product offering. What it is also intended to reflect is the requisite mindset of elite athletes, who understand that to stay at the top of their sport they must do whatever is necessary to add that extra 1% to their performance. The brand's mission is to create garments to help them do this.

It was founded in 2016 by brothers Tom and Phil Beahon. Both played professional sport to a respectable level, with Phil having been a cricketer and Tom a footballer. They have said that this experience has given them "a deep appreciation of what athletes want from sportswear". They set about creating their own brand as they believed there was a lack of high-quality sportswear available for men, aiming to position themselves in what they saw as a gap in the market for a high-end alternative to the products offered by the more established names. They looked to the success of another UK-company, premium cycling wear brand Rapha, as proof that there are

plenty of consumers who are willing and able to spend a bit more to get better-quality performance apparel.

Castore's rise has been swift, but it owed much to a start-up grant that the brothers received from Newcastle University; Phil Beahon has said it was "genuinely integral" to getting the business off the ground. It has since completed two rounds of equity raising, with investors during the first round in October 2017 including Tom Singh, founder of UK-based high street retailer New Look. A second round followed in June last year; the most prominent investor was Robert Senior, former boss of advertising giant Saatchi & Saatchi, who described it as "a truly modern brand for a truly modern athlete".

Every little helps

Castore's design process is based around the concept of marginal gains. It shares the conviction of many elite athletes that a series of very minor improvements, when combined, can lead to fundamentally better performance. It pledges to "leave no stone unturned" when it comes to searching for such improvements.

It says the fabrics it uses are on average six times more expensive than those used by traditional apparel makers. WSA has confirmed that Italian warp knit fabrics manufacturer

Castore released its first range of apparel specifically for golfers earlier this year.

 Castore



Eurojersey is among its suppliers; Castore only goes as far as to say that it sources all its fabrics from within the European Union. It also explains that the open honeycomb structure of its fabrics makes them 50% thinner than conventional warp knit fabrics. This is said to reduce drying time and improve body moisture transfer. Several garments are made from an ultra-high-flex fabric that it claims can be stretched seven times beyond its resting position without losing its shape.

The advanced engineering it employs includes 3D printing, laser-cutting and heat-welding techniques. These see fabric components bonded together with heat rather than through conventional sewing methods. Many of its products feature odour-control technology from Polygiene.

Garments are manufactured at a sportswear factory in Portugal, with prototypes tested for 100 consecutive days by athletes before going into full production, pushing each item to its limit. The offer of a three-year guarantee on all items demonstrates confidence in the quality of the products.

Automotive inspiration

One of the brand's collections to date is the Flyweight range, released in early 2018. As the name might suggest, the focus was on making products as light as possible. This was achieved through the use of a lightweight mesh fabric from a Swiss supplier, with the brand describing this material as its "lightest ever". Garments in the collection also had an entirely seamless structure, achieved by heat welding, to further minimise the weight.

The range was created with speed in mind. Designers took inspiration from the elite engineering that takes place in Formula One motor racing. They aimed to transfer some of the learnings from that sport into premium training garments. With this in mind, optimal fit was achieved by eliminating any excess fabric. Products went through an intensive 18-month testing process, which included extensive use of wind tunnels, an essential tool of the motor racing industry.

Its Eden jacket features laser-perforated ventilation to enhance temperature regulation. Holes of different sizes are cut into different areas of the jacket depending on the level of ventilation required. In addition, Castore incorporated a carbon-based filament, which it says improves durability and comfort. Another piece in the Flyweight collection is the Karlsson Tee, which as well as the lightweight mesh fabric and seamless structure also has strategically placed flex panels to offer a better range of movement.



The Karlsson Tee is part of the brand's Flyweight range, which features a lightweight mesh fabric.

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In the swing

The company has largely focused on apparel for training during its first years, but one of its goals is to create products targeted at specific sports or activities. It got this new chapter of its story under way in March with the release of its first golf collection. As was the case with earlier endeavours, the aim was to provide performance apparel for this sport that is of a higher standard than already available in the market.

Much of the emphasis during the design process for its golf range was on optimising the wearer's freedom of movement in all conditions. All the fabrics used in its golf clothing have four-way stretch to ensure an effective and uninhibited swing. The heat-welded construction is said to result in stronger seams, seven times stronger, the company claims, than a traditional sewn seam.

The jackets in the collection were in development for over two years, with various versions having been tested on more than 60 golf courses in 20 countries. A high-quality waterproof finish means they offer protection against all weather conditions, while mesh-lined collars offer additional warmth. There are also adjustable cuffs and front pocket layering for convenient storage of balls.

Its golf pants and shorts have a tailored fit around the upper quad and calf muscles for



The Beahon brothers, Tom (left) and Phil (right), with tennis star Andy Murray, who has pledged his support for Castore.

 Darren Gerrish

added comfort. An interior fabric treatment maximises wicking when playing in warm conditions and the waistband has been specially designed to avoid chafing.

Superstar support

The next target in Castore's sights is tennis, for which it plans to release a range of apparel this summer. Breaking into this market should be much easier now that it has three-time Grand Slam winner and former world number one Andy Murray on board. It officially announced this partnership after the Scottish star wore its kit at the Australian Open tournament in January.

The company said this would be a long-term relationship that would last beyond Mr Murray's tennis career, the future of which is now in some doubt after he underwent hip resurfacing surgery in the hope of overcoming a long-standing injury problem. Castore has explained that he will offer insight into product design, marketing initiatives and the development of its athletes roster. Reports in the UK press suggest he has made a strategic investment in the business and will occupy a seat on its board.

Referring to this partnership, Mr Murray said: "Castore is a young, exciting brand that offers something different, with products that are really well cut and designed. For me it was a natural progression from previous kit partners. They're the best I have tried and trained in. I am looking forward to working with their design team on the tennis line and to be part of a British success story."

Open to opportunities

The brand has said it "doubled down" on its investment in research and development during the first three months of this year. It is also making great strides in Asia, saying it has seen strong growth in the region, especially in Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan. With this in mind, the founders have said they are in discussion with potential partners to further build a presence there via its own digital platforms and through retail partnerships.

Having spent the first years of its existence as a purely digital business, the company in December set up its first pop-up store in London's affluent Knightsbridge district. This is something it hopes to do again in the future, with the Beahon brothers saying the experience has opened their minds to "the great opportunities offered by stores". Their ambition is to have pop-up and permanent stores in a number of major cities before the end of this year. 

The Sutcliffe golf trousers are tailored to the leg muscles, stylish on and off the course.

 Castore

