Despite all of the talk of global warming and the lack of snow at the end of last year in European ski resorts, there was plenty of exciting new winter gear at ISPO in February. The show was much bigger than before, with plenty of streetwear and sporty labels, as well as the usual skis, fitness equipment and hardwear on show.

**Cosy feet and a warm winter at ISPO**

Keeping warm and dry is very important in winter—in a crisp Alpine ski resort waterproofness is not usually as high a priority as warmth—but, as winters become warmer and warmer, they are turning cold and slushy, even in Scandinavian cities such as Oslo. As a result the emphasis on water resistant membrane technology such as eVENT (Lafuma) and Gore-Tex (Viking) is growing because when the climate becomes wet, you feel colder. To keep feet cosy, Scarpa has introduced nice warm electrically heated insocks with an on/off remote control and lithium polymer batteries, and a thermo sensor. And it is not only shoes that need to keep the wet out, Sealskinz makes waterproof gloves and socks with a membrane system that is very strong. The outer sock is acrylic, whilst the inner sock is in Merino wool for comfort with a Porelle membrane inside and is used for industrial and military clothing as well as being popular with sailors who can take their boots off and walk around below deck. Trials are now also being carried out to develop soccer socks with a waterproof foot part.

Natural materials, in particular wool, are making a strong comeback in high tech winter products. Since Timberland's purchase of Smartwool, the use of Merino wool in sportswear and shoes has exploded. At ISPO it could be seen in Timberland's slip-ons, in winter versions of MiOn's moulded floatable sandals on four-way siped soles, and even inside waterproof socks. MiOn's floatable wide-footed casual shoes have Merino in the lining and a heavy duty Smartwool sock, which can be pulled half out to be washed and also to be used to shake stones out of the holes. Warm and woolly on the outside is trendy too, Lowa showed a nice cosy-looking winter trekking type boot with a nubuck and felt upper. There is also plenty of tweed and felt on sporty practical footwear: Aigle's rubber Wellingtons now come in a choice of tweeds, brown or dogtooth black and white, and there were also dogtooth and Prince of Wales checks on Bean boots by Sorel. Vulcanised boots have been turned wintry with woolly knit and felt collars on suede and heavy canvas uppers, often with wool or pile linings.

There is suddenly a great deal of wool in shoes too. Timberland has used yet more Smartwool in its linings and uppers for casual shoes and it seems to be more integrated than before.

**Technology from head to toe**

The ‘seamless’ technology introduced by Salomon for shoes two seasons ago has really set the ball rolling and almost every shoe brand worth its salt had a version, inspired by the popular soft shell or PacLite jackets. These shoes appear to have welded and taped seams and the minimum of stitching, however, as it seems that it is hard to use a welding machine when the seams are not flat (since shoe uppers must be three-dimensional by definition) , many of these ‘seamless’ shoes use the minimum of stitching and hide joins underneath taping or rubber overlays.

Wearable technology is still big, and it is becoming more and more workable. Jackets with soft wiring built into the fibres are becoming more common, and there are many jackets and bags with built in audio systems for i-Pods. But wearable technology is not only for pleasure, it can be functional too. Achillex has attached special sensors to an ankle brace and the body, so that the wearer’s running style can be easily measured in a much freer way. Instead of being restrained and inhibited by a running track, the user can run totally freely and be measured at the same time. The correct running shoes can then be selected for the individual wearer, based on whether they pronate or supinate, roll in or outwards, and they can also be scanned afterwards to make sure they get the correct size too.

The term may have been around for some time, but thinking ‘out of the box’ can certainly still lead to success and Meindl’s innovative cross
Timberland with Boa-Fit lacing.
country ski boots won an award at ispo. The skis use the Salomon SNS Pilot system, which up to now has only been used for racing and speed skating, which it has now adapted for normal use. The double axes offer maximum transfer of power in the starting phase and excellent rolling in the front area. The boots incorporate Thinsulate and have a higher cut and shape allowing more elasticity and keeping more snow out—proving advances can still be made in very traditional markets.

The perfect fit

Footwear comfort was again a major focus and Feelmax of Finland has used Keprotec for the soles of its revolutionary new indoor/outdoor shoes, designed to help athletes get fitter feet. The idea is that the shoes encourage walking barefoot to exercise all the muscles in the feet and to encourage better balance. The shoes adapt to the shape of the wearer’s feet just like socks and the light footwear keeps toes straight and lets them grab the ground gently, whilst keeping the heel at the same level as the toes, thus strengthening leg and foot muscles. According to Feelmax, even small heel elevations can shorten calf muscles and reduce leg strength.

Keen, which is better known for its wide toed sandals and boots, has added more styles with added technical features such as eVENT waterproof membranes and thermal insulation. These shoes are no longer just anti-fashion statement shoes but have a stronger technical edge. One shoe resembles a spider’s web as all of its seams are welded rather than stitched, adding more comfort and waterproofing.

The launch of Salewa’s first ‘Blister Free’ collection of hiking boots went well and is now in its second season. One reason for its success is the use of multiple width lasts which, up to now, have not been common in European sports footwear.

What’s inside the shoe is just as important as the outside, and in sport, fit is vital. Montrail’s technical rock climbing shoes use the same technology as its mouldable footbed sandals. The shoes are warmed up and then put on when warm so that they mould to the foot, creating the very tight fit necessary for climbing. In effect, this tightness adds more comfort as the shoes no longer need to be one or two sizes too small. Maybe this technology should be adapted to car racing shoes as, speaking at the Volvo design conference held at ispo, Formula1 driver David Coulthard said that the boots worn for driving must be so close fitting (when sitting in the car feet are at the same level as the head) that they feel too tight when walking around the paddock.

The theme of the Volvo design conference
was personal design and one point that came across strongly is that, in sports equipment and especially shoes, fit is the most important demand for athletes, followed by performance, and with graphics lagging far behind. One good example of this is the rapidly growing mi adidas made to order system, which not only offers a personalised colour choice, but left and right shoes can be ordered in different widths and sizes.

Custom orthotics and formable footbeds are no longer designed just to alleviate medical complaints, as they are now used to improve fit and act as much as a prevention as a cure. Formthotics of New Zealand sells a sports performance insock that forms itself inside the shoe, rather than just to the foot. The sock is heated up, put inside the shoe (to replace the existing sock) and then the wearer stands up to get a perfect fit in their own shoes. Practical layering is no longer just for jackets either. The ACG Considered Heater boots come in two parts and are like two pairs of shoes in one: an outside more rugged boot and a soft inner boot that can be pulled out and worn indoors.

Winter footwear for both men and women is also getting lighter in weight, especially shell boots that, in general, are no longer heavy to lug around. There are lightweight flexing shells from Columbia, especially for women and children. Hi-Tech goes one step further with its children’s and women’s shell boots which are extremely light. The entire shell is made in V-Lite and only the part of the outsole which is in direct contact with the ground is made in normal sticky rubber.

**Fur back in fashion**

When it comes to fashion, gone are most of the old brown and black winter boots. Ispo was buzzing with bright and pale colours in all categories. Hiking, trekking and winter boots are much more summery in colour, with plenty of off-white and light grey combined with pale green or banana, and sportier versions with cyan trims.

High fashion brands such as Bogner have created flashy ski and after-ski wear with fur trimmed hoods added to suits and parkas for men and women. These fashion-conscious skiers want high quality after-ski boots too and fashion winter boots for next year have plenty of long shafts and fur trims, to match the enormous number of fur trimmed hoodies. Boots have quilted nylon shafts, which are just a little puffy, often teamed with suede or leather feet and with zips added to create a clean profile (Merrell, Aigle). From Dolomite, there were real cow hair retro boots, teamed with Dolomite’s puffa nylon ski jackets, for a full retro look.