

## On location: Melbourne, Australia

# What a start to the year

It seems that, at the start of the calendar year, the entire sporting world trains its sights on the Australian city of Melbourne.

It's the second largest city in what Australians refer to as "the Commonwealth" (of states and territories; Melbourne is the capital of the state of Victoria) and is now a thriving, colourful, multicultural place. It has twice been voted the best city in the world to live in (sharing the accolade with Vancouver).

The people who live there (around 3.75 million) are entitled to be the envy of the sports fans the world over—and especially readers of *WSA*—because on the city's official website it says quite clearly that the three things Melburnians love the most are sport, fashion and festivals.

That means that the big events on the sporting calendar there usually carry a dash of panache in terms of what the athletes and spectators wear.

### Festival of cricket

New year celebrations always seem about to start just as the famous Boxing Day (December 26) cricket match takes place at the Melbourne

Cricket Ground. The most recent match was a five-day international (test) match between Australia and India, for which 68,000 fans packed into the stadium.

As the winner of the last three Cricket World Cup tournaments (played under a different format), the Australian team can claim to be at the top of the pile in this sport and, as such, it has inevitably attracted important sponsorship deals from the sports apparel community. At present, it has a four-year deal with adidas, which ends in 2009, and the sports brand has used this to introduce plenty of innovation to cricket uniforms.

Among recent new ideas are tops with "new compression fabrics" that adidas has introduced—for the first time in cricket—to minimise players' energy loss and recovery times. Style touches include short, bicep-hugging sleeves and round collarless necks, giving an unusual but contemporary look for this traditional sport.

### Anyone for tennis?

Into January and attentions turn to tennis. The first Grand Slam tournament of the year is always the Australian Open, which Melbourne—of course—hosts.

*The roof of the Melbourne Cricket Ground provided the unlikely location for a tennis court constructed specially for the launch of the adidas Barricade V tennis shoe.*

 adidas ?????

This year the women's and men's singles titles went to Maria Sharapova and Novak Djokovic respectively, with Djokovic's triumph—in four sets in the final against French newcomer Jo-Wilfried Tsonga—proving of particular interest from an equipment innovation point of view.

The Serbian right-hander was one of the tennis athletes involved in the launch at the tournament of the latest version, the fifth, of legendary adidas tennis shoe, the Barricade.

The sports brand says the Barricade V is the lightest version yet, with features such as synthetic leather uppers an integral part of this. The midsole has an insert made of its proprietary adiprene+ cushioning material for "forefoot propulsion", and the outsole contains the company's high-density, durable rubber compound, Adiwear, for strength in high-wear areas.

The official launch took place in the immediate build-up to this year's tournament on a tennis court specially constructed on the roof of the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

One of the players involved in the showpiece publicity launch, Marco Baghdatis, said afterwards: "I knew when coming to the Australian Open that we would be playing on a different surface, but this is taking it to the extreme."

He added the rooftop location was a fitting venue for the launch of the shoe that, he said, was known among players as 'the legend'. He said he was looking forward to wearing them in the heat of battle on the courts of the Rod Laver Arena. He won two matches wearing the shoes before losing to Leyton Hewitt in round three.

### Dramatic race

Melbourne is also the venue for the opening Formula One event of the calendar year, the Australian Grand Prix. For this event, the city's Albert Park suburb and the roads around it transform themselves into a 5.3-kilometre motor-racing circuit that provides a stern test for the greatest drivers in the world.

This year, McLaren's Lewis Hamilton won the inaugural race of the season in a dramatic finish. The same driver, who was pipped for the drivers' championship at the death in his first season last year, is promoting a new McLaren footwear collection at the moment, so his place on the podium must have been a welcome sight for Barcelona-based Fashion Ventures 21 and Action Sports, from Germany, who are the partners marketing and manufacturing the new shoes.

With the help of engineers from the McLaren team, they have developed a collection of sports and 'lifestyle-comfort' shoes that include proprietary technology to make them breathable and waterproof. Ramón Artigas, who is in charge of sales and marketing for the new venture says an extensive promotional programme for the footwear will have considerable input from Lewis



*The new adidas Barricade tennis shoe, which made its debut at the Australian Open in Melbourne at the start of this year.*

 adidas.

Hamilton and his team-mate Heikki Kovalainen.

The Formula One drivers are clearly top stars but they may still struggle to bring as much of a buzz to the launch of the McLaren footwear collection as Mr Artigas achieved at the GDS exhibition in Dusseldorf in March when he persuaded Mercedes-Benz McLaren to allow him to incorporate an SLR sports car—worth €500,000—into the presentation. It turned more than a few heads.

### Passion for fashion

Returning to Melbourne, the city's fashion credentials receive strong support from an event called the L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival, which takes place in March.

This year, there were plenty of sports references in the collections on display, reflecting, as we have said, the connection Melburnians make between the two.

Nowhere is this connection more obvious than at the Spring Carnival, a festival of horse-racing at which people from all over the state of Victoria seek to show off their taste in clothes. There's even a prize for the best-dressed person at the final race of the carnival, voted by local people who have watched on television throughout.

The sport of kings is as important as all other sports to the people of Melbourne and the pinnacle of the carnival, the Melbourne Cup, is now described as 'the race that stops the nation' as the whole of Australia looks on. Part of the attraction is the horse-race, but the clothes on show in the stands also attract plenty of attention. It's part of what gives Melbourne its place in the sporting world. 