



Garment Construction



All our own work

A wealth of performance fabric is available to sports and fashion brands, with constant innovation adding new functionality all the time.

New features—to protect wearer from the sun, the wind and the rain, to heal body and spirit through aromatherapy, to stretch more naturally with the body's movements, and to manage moisture, odour and heart-rate—are coming to market every week, it seems.

And still there are companies across the whole sports clothing and equipment landscape who prefer to come up with their own innovations, committing large chunks of their budgets to research and development (R&D) and to marketing a new fabric that often share the performance characteristics of material that is already on the market.

It's a classic 'make or buy' decision and a minority of companies insists on carrying out technical development work in house every time.

Fresh approach

When Kelme, a maker of sports footwear based in Alicante, Spain, launched a new

football boot in predominantly shark leather (a first for football boots) at the end of 2007, it went to some length to explain that its new product, The One—Limited Edition, had another innovative feature. To make the boots breathable and waterproof, Kelme decided to build in membrane technology and chose to develop its own, calling it K-Fresh Air.

As politely as possible, we asked the manufacturer why it had chosen to follow the path to the patent office rather than buy in the technology from the list of suppliers who already offer it. Kelme said: "We think it's better for us to be the architects of our own success."

Fashion Ventures 21, a company from Barcelona, has worked with a footwear manufacturing partner in Germany, Action Sports, to produce a new line of high-end leisure and sports shoes under the brand name of Formula One team McLaren. The vice-president for marketing the new McLaren Footwear range, Ramón Artigas, says that the engineering expertise of the motor-racing outfit has made a contribution to the design of the product, particularly in the home-grown 'McLaren Ventilation System', another membrane-based

Peak Performance has long-term partnerships in place with some of the most important fabric suppliers in the market, but its own R&D team still tests all products extensively in the lab and in the field.

 Peak Performance

enhancement to make the shoes breathable and waterproof.

"Of course we realised that other technologies were available to provide this functionality," Mr Artigas says, "but to have done this ourselves increases the exclusiveness of this new footwear. That's why we've done it."

Cash or credit?

Exclusivity is clearly a strong argument for making rather than buying technical material, but it's expensive (especially if you engage a Formula One engineering team to work on the venture with you). Going to this expense would make sense if you were going to make your new fabric or footwear technology available to the wider market, but that would be the end of your exclusivity. It's a dilemma.

The global marketing manager for Dow Fibre Solutions, Michel Caillibotte, may have a vested interest now, but after many years in the industry at Decathlon and then adidas (he joined Dow in 2006) he can justifiably claim to have seen all sides of this debate. He says: "It's not a straightforward situation. Some brands are too small to build up an entire platform on their own (with R&D, manufacturing, logistics, retail and marketing operations). The options they have are to use their technology in a niche and get little or no volume, or sell it to a big partner and get the volume, but none of the credit."

Swedish brand Peak Performance buys material from a long list of carefully chosen manufacturers—3XDRIY from Schoeller, Fieldsensor from Toray, Gore-Tex membrane, Lycra, Thermolite, Polartec—for its collections for activewear and sports, but it still runs its own R&D operation.

This interesting company was founded more than 20 years ago by Stefan Engström, a professional skier, and Peter Blom, who—until then—had been editor of magazines in Sweden covering (separately) skiing and fashion. After a day on the slopes at Åre in the mountains in the centre of the country, the two decided it would be a great idea to use their passion for design and winter sports to launch their own clothing company in the outdoor space and Peak Performance is the result.

Proceed with care

The brand's core values reflect a love of the wild outdoors, but they are also pragmatic: they insist that Peak Performance will build long-term partnerships with its suppliers and provide a guarantee for all its products. It feels it can only offer this guarantee if it is at the forefront of technical innovation in the fabric space and if it tests rigorously all new material developments and the products it develops from them. This is the role its R&D team fulfils, and one thing the



Kelme's new shark-leather football boot, The One-Limited Edition. The manufacturer developed its own membrane-based system to make the boots waterproof and breathable, saying it prefers to be the architect of its own success.

 Kelme

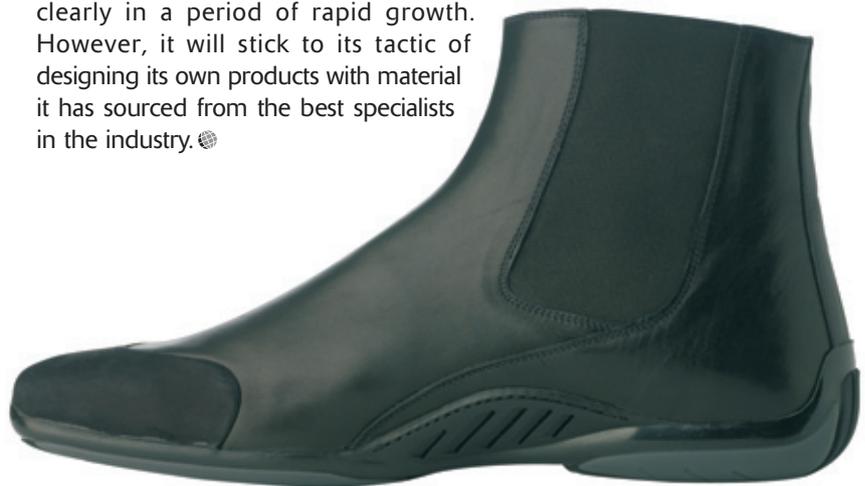
company has kept under its ownership is that the products and materials that pass earn the title 'HiPE', to show that they have met Peak Performance's exacting standards.

This philosophy of choosing the 'buy' option, but with the greatest possible care, seems to be working well for the brand. As well as working with golf and winter sports retailers all over Europe, across Canada and in one select location in each of Japan, Hong Kong and Dubai, it now has more than 60 boutiques of its own that, curiously, it calls General Stores, showing off the best of its collections.

Eight more of these general stores opened towards the end of last year, so the company is clearly in a period of rapid growth. However, it will stick to its tactic of designing its own products with material it has sourced from the best specialists in the industry.

Part of the new McLaren Footwear collection showing the proprietary ventilation system at the side.

 McLaren Footwear



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