



When the world's fourth largest and the UK's most popular apparel brands decide simultaneously to move into footwear, to be told that all is no more than coincidence is stretching both the long arm and the credulity of interested observers. But, of course, it is.

*Lightweight carbon rubber outsoles undoubtedly provide good traction for the wearer of these Excursion general purpose shoes.*

 Regatta

## Expansion underfoot

**C**elebrating the 25th anniversary of the development of its Lifa base-layer clothing (of which more in a forthcoming issue), Norwegian-based Helly-Hansen also released full details of its performance footwear range which matches the gamut of its offerings on the clothing front by hitting every leisure activity from hard-line water sports through street-wear, sandals and low-level hiking to trail work. The overriding identification notches up 22 models but each has a sub-range of several specifications and colourways which brings the full total on offer to well over a hundred options. HH actually ran a small number of specialist water-borne models earlier

this year, but did so without all the usual marketing fanfares.

The UK's most popular brand, Regatta, also launched a footwear range this autumn, tiptoeing its way in a strictly land-borne series, opening with performance sandals and closing with lightweight boots. Eighteen models in all – including women-specific versions – with leather and/or fabric uppers, Regatta's footwear, too, strides in parallel to the company's clothing ranges. With colourways the final tally is 37 options.

### Justifiable claim

Both companies can justifiably claim the benefit of logic in expanding into a sector involving a 'must-have' for every outdoor activist, although

*Trail Beater's outsole is a 2-part assembly incorporating a mid-foot stabiliser component.*

 Helly Hansen

*Helly Hansen describes the Shorehike boot as 'the most ambitious and radical shoe made for sailing'.*

 Helly Hansen



they operate at widely differing image perceptions. Both have a strong sell-through in their clothing ranges and both have achieved a healthy recognition of the respective brand names. The intention is that the respective consumers will appreciate the ability to expand their product ownership and will be able to achieve all their outdoor requirements from one retail source and one brand.

The most surprising fact in both launches is that neither company has chosen to tread the path of the externally-branded specialist outsole. Instead, they have used the talents of freshly-employed specialist design teams to develop a range of activity-specific soles in appropriate mixes of raw materials. The significance of the human resource investment involved will not be lost on interested onlookers.

### Sole designs and materials

Regatta sole systems use its own designs, which have been developed with the optimisation of grip, underfoot stability and comfort in mind. Traction is said to be excellent, via the carbon rubber compound outsoles, throughout the whole walking action, and is suitable for wide variations in terrain. The outsoles are

said to be hard-wearing and non-marking (an important factor in public buildings with modern floor coverings). Regatta says that the compound was specially formulated to its own specification.

There are two main sole systems:

- System 1 is a lightweight assembly comprising a compression moulded EVA midsole with added shock pads and an outer sole skin of carbon rubber. Regatta says that the system provides an extremely light, protective and high performance outsole suitable for sandals, trail, light hiking and travel.
- System 2 is used for all the hiking footwear specifications in the range and uses a cupsole configuration where the outer shell of carbon rubber is fitted with lightweight EVA shock absorbing pads at the heel and forefoot.

Unusually for Regatta, neither system has been subjected to a component own-branding operation, thus avoiding confusion for its potential customers in a market sector where the latest (and not necessarily the best) gimmicks are characterised by multi-identity hype.

At first sight the sole designs appear to be a fairly standard collection of cleats and bars but closer inspection reveals that the

depth of cut and the under-cut angles are all cleverly geared to the determined application – shallower and more vertical for general leisure and road work and deeper and reverse angled for hill walking and tougher terrain.

Helly Hansen's sole designs and materials are congregated in the majority under the brand name 'Storm Grip' – evocative enough but possibly confusing when allied to widely differing applications. The exception is the eponymous Hellywear sole systems applied to the Trail Beater and Moss Beater running and trekking variants.

Storm Grip outsoles have been developed from Helly Hansens's long-term involvement with the water sports market. In general, they are non-marking gum rubber designed variously to either allow water to drain out of the shoe or to provide a sure footing in slippery conditions. The former condition is achieved with the aid of perforations in the outsole, the latter through the application of high hysteresis rubber.

The design patterns are governed by the intended application of the shoe or boot and range from almost smooth for on-deck use through to cleats and bars for shore-side grip.

Hellywear outsoles are described as a '2-part bottom unit with Freedom Bar midfoot stabiliser'. Heavily cleated to achieve maximum grip and traction on a variety of rough terrains, the imprints left by the designs resemble the passing of tracked armoured vehicles.

There are many who will say that the world-wide footwear market is heavily over-populated with brands and sub-brands. Perversely, that seems to make the move by the two clothing specialists more logical. One shop – one stop. 

