

FOOTWEAR TECHNOLOGY: STUFFITTS

Taking the sting out of stinky shoes

A start-up company in the US has devised a new footwear product made from a very old material. Stuffitts, the brainchild of CEO Mike Huebner, are shoe savers made using cedar wood in combination with technical fabric. Mr Huebner explains that no matter whether the climate is wet or dry, hot or cold, and no matter the environment or outdoor terrain, sports and outdoor shoes are bound to contain moisture, leading to bacterial build-up and the possibility of bad smells.

Combating this problem, he says, can increase the product lifecycle of expensive footwear. Mr Huebner describes the Georgia-based company's

shoe savers as "a really cool product" and a much better option than chemical products such as disinfectant or deodorising sprays. He says: "It solves an age-old problem: how to get rid of stinky, wet, smelly shoes. It's a simple solution that's virtually maintenance-free. You're done exercising, your feet have been sweating inside your shoes. It's been raining, the shoe's wet. All you do is take the Stuffitt shoe saver and stick it in your shoe."





Stuffitts claims its shoe savers help shoes dry eight times faster than air drying.

 Stuffitts

Straight to work

Each shoe saver has two parts: a washable outer shell and an inner core. Both parts are surrounded by technical fabric, which Mr Huebner describes as being “just like on a technical t-shirt”. The idea is that it quickly wicks moisture through the outer shell and into the core, drying the shoe at a much faster rate than if the shoe is simply left to dry on its own. According to the company, it can take more than 24 hours to air-dry a pair of shoes. In fact, after 24 hours, many shoes will still be more than 50% wet, Mr Huebner claims. As a result, bacteria and, subsequently, bad odours are hard to avoid without a little extra help.

The company’s first shoe saver product was a one-piece shoe saver that worked along the same lines as the newer two-piece model. However, the core could not be removed, so the product did not last as long as the newer version with the replaceable insert. “While it’s certainly an effective product, I am definitely biased to our new version 2.0 which, I think, is a quantum leap forward in performance and aesthetics,” Mr Huebner states. Added to this are the environmental and economic benefits of being able to buy replacement inserts rather than having to throw the whole product away each time it needs to be replaced.

The company founder claims the shoe savers can dry out shoes eight times faster than air drying. “In fact, I had a lab run a test on them because I was telling people how fast and effective they were and nobody believed me,” he says. “They took running shoes and

submerged them in water for five minutes. After that they stuck the Stuffitt in. They were 62% dry within one hour.” This was determined by weighing the shoes at given points to gauge how much moisture remained inside the shoe. The results showed that after 12 hours the shoe was around 85% dry, and after 24 hours the shoe was more or less completely dry. The shoe saver achieves most of the work within the first hour, he claims.

Natural process

The shoe saver cores are made from 100% eastern red cedar which, according to Mr Huebner, is “highly absorbent”. Wood of all kinds absorbs moisture and cedar has been renowned for centuries as a source of fresh smells. Mr Huebner believes cedar makes bad odours disappear completely and prevents the build-up of bacteria, unlike many chemical-based products, which he says merely mask bad smells. “Our shoe savers eliminate moisture better than any footwear product, keeping shoes fresh and eliminating that stinky shoe smell. Use them every day to keep your shoes in work-ready, race-ready, everyday life-ready condition,” he advises.

This type of cedar wood is native to eastern North America, from south-eastern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, east of the Great Plains, so it is easy for the company to get hold of. Not only is the wood fragrant, it is also light and durable, making it well suited to this type of application. It is often used to protect clothes from moths and is naturally rot-resistant, so it has a decent

lifespan. According to the company, the inserts should be replaced every six months for maximum effectiveness.

Keeping people active

American long-distance runner Dane Rauschenberg, who ran 52 marathons, one every weekend, throughout 2006, bumped into Mr Huebner at the Atlanta Marathon expo at the end of November and was given a pair of Stuffitts to try. "Usually, wearing wet shoes is not a problem for me," he says. "I have a large selection of shoes and rotate them rather often. As such, I rarely wear the same pair on consecutive days. However, the other day I went for a run that left my feet particularly mushy. So, I decided I would jam the Stuffitts in the shoes to see what they could do."

The next day he went to grab a different pair of shoes and spotted the Stuffitts poking out of the original pair and thought he would test them out. Although he says the climate in Salt Lake City, where he was at the time, was dry, all of his shoes still held moisture. After using the shoe savers, however, he claims the shoes were "bone dry" and had a pleasant cedar odour, just over 12 hours after he had used them. "When I go on my next running trip, and do not have the luxury of packing a few pairs of shoes, the Stuffitts are going with me," he says.

One of the reasons the product has been so successful, Mr Huebner believes, is that it has been designed by an athlete for athletes. The company founder is an extremely active man; he competes in a range of different activities including cycling and running, and hopes the product will encourage other sports fans to stay active. The shoe savers can be used in any pair of shoes or boots and are available in various sizes and colours. 



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 Stuffitts

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