

FOOTWEAR TECHNOLOGY: NORMAN WALSH/LEXUS

A new handmade shoe from sports brand Norman Walsh takes its inspiration from automotive brand Lexus, including its use of upholstery leather in the upper.

Lexus-inspired sports shoe

Sports footwear brand Norman Walsh, the name behind the shoe that helped break the four-minute mile barrier, has worked with Lexus to produce a limited-edition, hand-crafted athletic shoe inspired by the quality and craftsmanship of the automotive company's CT F Sport luxury, self-charging, hybrid hatchback.

Called the CT, the shoe draws on the design, colour palette and interior materials of the car. The upper combines bright red perforated leather and black suede, with contrast red stitching. The soles are made from hard-wearing PVC. Walsh's head of design, Jason Crompton, says the "soft and supple" leather upholstery that Lexus uses in its CT range helped inspire the footwear brand, which is why some of the leather Walsh has used to make the limited-edition shoe is material that would more usually go into an automotive interior.

Mr Crompton says: "Here we had a small, hand-made shoe business working together with an automotive giant, yet there was a nice duality between our shared approach to craftsmanship and luxury detail. This made it a rewarding project for us to work on and we are very pleased with the results, which draw directly on the inspiration provided by the Lexus CT F Sport."

'Brave' design

Ewan Shepherd, UK director of Lexus, comments: "We are passionate about craftsmanship and quality. We receive lots of positive feedback about the brave design of our range of cars, which are contemporary yet different in the marketplace. The CT F Sport is one of the most effective in bringing new customers to the Lexus brand, particularly those leading busy urban lifestyles. This made our partnership with Walsh a natural meeting of minds and the result is an innovative sports trainer that delivers both amazing looks and great performance."

Lexus insists that, just as its cars have inspired the new Norman Walsh sports shoe, sport has also inspired models such as the CT 200h F Sport, which it says is evident in the car's "sharper styling and sports-themed interior".

Handmade heritage

All the CT shoes are handmade in the UK at Norman Walsh Footwear's Bolton factory. The company was founded in 1961 by Norman Walsh, the son of a cobbler who became a master of his craft while working for another local shoemaker after World War II.

Mr Walsh was chosen to work on a number of high-profile sporting commissions, including making the running shoes worn by Dr Roger Bannister when he broke the four-minute mile in 1954. Norman Walsh Footwear also produced the first mountain and fell running shoes. More recently, the company has embarked on a series of joint-projects with prominent fashion designers, leading to this new collaboration with Lexus.

Old leather, new products

Earlier this year, the vice-president for design for Seton AutomotiveLeather, part of the GST AutoLeather group, Florian Schrey, called on car companies to turn "old leather" into new products. He said the upholstery on one seat inside a 20-year-old Audi, which he found in a junkyard in Germany, yielded enough material to make six pairs of shoes. It would be thrilling if the leather in the CT shoes were able to tap into the cachet of 'reclaim and reuse' in the same way. But, alas, no.

A glance at the shoe itself shows clearly where the upholstery leather fits in. Black suede frames a flash of perforated grain leather in sporty red across the mid-section of the upper, in the same way that red runs through black on the bodywork of a special-edition CT 200h F Sport that Lexus put on display at the time of the launch, repeating the theme in the interior of the vehicle.

Walsh tells WSA that it sourced the perforated upholstery leather directly from an automotive tannery in Italy rather than ask Lexus or its suppliers for surplus stock. Jason Crompton still says the shoe and the car are "a perfect match". He describes the interior, with its bold stitching and the effect of the perforated leather as looking "really striking" to the Walsh design team. "We chose to use upholstery leather to recreate that environment, the luxurious feel that the car interior gave," he concludes.

Red blends with black on the new handmade CT shoe from Norman Walsh and on the body of the Lexus CT 200h F Sport that provided the footwear brand's inspiration.

 Norman Walsh/Lexus

