

FOOTWEAR TECHNOLOGY: SALOMON

The first product to emerge from a strategy at Salomon to bring circular economy principles into its business involves a running shoe with recyclability designed into it. At the end of the shoe's useful life, the materials it contains can become the shell of a new ski boot.

Concept shoe has softer impact

Sports brand Salomon has released details of a broad sustainability initiative it has called Play Minded Program. One idea to have come out of this already is the concept for a running shoe that can be recycled into the shell of a ski boot. This is the result of 18 months' research and development, the company states. Chief executive Jean-Marc Pambet, says the company has always prided itself on having "a uniquely close relationship" with local sports communities. He adds: "Today's outdoor sports participants expect us to make a positive impact on the world."

In keeping with this, the company has pledged to reduce its overall carbon emissions by 30% by the year 2030. Salomon will also eliminate perfluorinated compounds (PFCs) across all equipment categories by 2023. There will be no PFCs in Salomon footwear by the autumn of 2020, in gear by 2022, and in winter sports equipment and apparel by 2023. By 2025, it claims that 70% of the waste created by Salomon's operations will be

recycled or reused and the environmental performance of every Salomon product will be available to the consumer.

Circular economy principles

The recyclable concept shoe was developed at the company's Annecy design centre in the French Alps. It is made of thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU), which can be ground down at the end of its life, then combined with new material and used to construct an alpine ski boot shell. Though it is a concept at this point, Salomon believes the shoe offers a glimpse into how it may be able "to tackle circular economy principles in the future across various product categories inside the brand".

In the circular economy, which consumers and politicians everywhere say they want to move towards, it is important to maintain the value of products, materials and resources for as long as possible and to keep waste to a minimum. One of the best ways of preventing items from going to waste is to claim materials that are no longer needed or wanted as the input for making new products. These are considerations that must

This concept shoe for running is the first product to result from Salomon's Play-Minded Program.

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At the end of the running shoe's useful life, the materials it contains can be recycled and used to make the shell of a new Alpine ski boot.

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start at the very beginning of a product's life. This is because the design phase and production processes necessarily have an impact on sourcing, resource use and waste generation. The 'cradle to cradle' concept is now gaining ever more traction.

Drastic reduction in environmental impact

At Salomon, the footwear team is already working to implement elements of the concept shoe in running footwear that will be available in 2021. "We recognise that we have to do better for the environment by creating footwear that drastically reduces its impact on the planet," says the company's vice-president for footwear, Guillaume Meyzenq. "By creating this concept shoe that can be recycled into a ski boot shell, we are showing that it is possible to find alternative materials to create performance footwear. It's an exciting development that will help lead us to more sustainable footwear solutions in the future."

Fair play

Play Minded Program has four key areas of focus, all with a 'play' theme. In this context there are 'toys' (the products themselves), 'playmakers' (the people who create the products people use to play outdoors), the 'playground' (the places where sports and outdoor activities take place), and the 'players' (the people who make up the communities of outdoor and sports enthusiasts). Recently, Jean-Marc Pambet wrote an open letter to explain the strategy. He said he wanted Salomon to be more open and transparent towards key stakeholders, among whom he listed consumers, retail partners, media, professional organisations and "our communities".

The Salomon chief executive says the brand's aim is to be "a responsible and proactive player", with a view to making its own business more sustainable and encouraging the stakeholders on the list to do so as well. Playing aside, in 2020, this is serious stuff. 



Ski boots in a Salomon store in Munich. European manufacturers dominate global ski boot production. Salomon's special circular ski boot story may give it an extra edge.

 Salomon

Japan deal delivers ski boot bonus

This could be an exciting time for the European ski boots manufacturing sector in general. Just one small footwear-making district, the ski boots cluster in the Montebelluna area in northern Italy, has claimed it produces 60% of the world's ski boots. In Salomon's case, it designs its ski boots at its design centre in Annecy in France and has manufacturing partners in Austria and Bulgaria.

It is easy to forget that, amid the upheavals in global trade seen in recent years, there have also been positive developments. Halfway through 2018, the European Union and Japan signed a new Economic Partnership Agreement, an important step towards a free trade deal between the two.

Ski boot producers rejoiced because the days of a 27% import duty in Japan on their products were numbered. Skiing may be less popular in Japan than it was in the boom years before the Asian economic crisis of the 1990s, but the country still has around 500 ski resorts and a ski market worth more than \$350 million per year. This deal will make it easier for European ski boot brands to claim a bigger piece of that cake and, within that, a coherent circular economy story may give Salomon an extra edge.