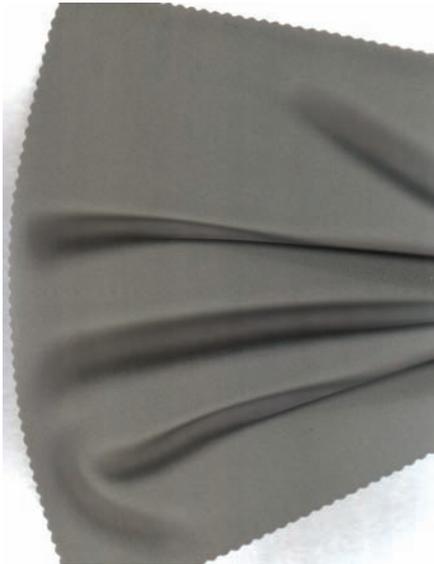


Dare to dream

Kathlyn Swantko reports from the recent Techtexil North America show in Las Vegas, USA.



SSM Industries, Inc. Profil FR fabric, which combines a versatile pallet of filament yarns with flame resistance (FR). This combination brings FR protection to applications once considered impossible to be flame resistant.



Collection of performance fabrics from King Tech Industries (from top to bottom): Water Resistant, Breathable Soft Shell fabric with fleece back and Triangle pattern High Reflective KTTex technology, 13.61 oz.; Polyester Rip Stop HyGy multi-function fabric, 3.39 oz.; Polyester Rip Stop HyGy multi-function fabric with Roma pattern High Reflective KTTex technology, 4.69 oz.; Polyester Pongee fabric with Floral pattern High Reflective KTTex technology, 3.89 oz.; Polyester Pongee HyGy multi-function fabric with Roma pattern High Reflective KTTex technology, 4.37 oz.

Technology, investment in innovation and daring to dream was the message from Rick Black, chief marketing officer for Performance Fibers worldwide, opening the symposiums at the recent Techtexil North America show.

In his keynote address, 'Adapting to Changing Times', Mr. Black, stated, "Technology is the key for today's business. We need to dare to dream, and become businesses with dreams. All of us have opportunities, if we dare to dream. So, we need to continue to make the investment in innovations."

This positive framing reflected the overall mood at the three-day event where there was a great deal of optimism, both on the trade show floor and in the seminars.

"Though we are certainly in tough economic times, most people I speak with are still upbeat," commented Bill Smith, Techtexil symposium director. "Some are even recording record sales, while others are new suppliers entering the market. And the chance to present new products at the first Techtexil event in the Western part of the U.S. is a great opportunity."

Surviving and innovating

The opening series of symposiums running alongside the exhibition focused on the overall state of the business and surviving in a difficult economy. The speakers looked at the current economic conditions with a positive attitude, and discussed how to become more efficient in business practices. One of the keys emphasised was production competency.

In his presentation 'U.S. Manufacturing Still Strong', Tom Murphy, executive vice president, RSM McGladrey, Inc., had this advice: "Don't walk away from your core business. Don't cut prices. Focus on your people."

One of Techtexil's steadfast exhibitors is doing just that. Gehring Textiles, Inc., a major manufacturer of warp knit and circular knit fabrics, has recently purchased the assets of Tweave, Inc., known for high quality woven 4-way stretch fabrics. And, close to 90% of the 36-person weaving staff in Tweave's Norton, MA, factory will continue in that facility.

"In addition to producing American-made knits, we can now boast superior, proven American-made stretch woven fabrics," said

Skip Gehring, president of the 62-year-old family business. "We know that Tweave stretch fabric has enormous potential in many of the diverse markets that we already service, but the demand for Tweave's speciality woven fabrics also exists elsewhere. Specifically, we know of industrial, medical and upholstery applications, and we see a huge potential in combining it with our GehringGuard Protective Fabrics in other booming markets."

In spite of somewhat light traffic, many exhibitors featuring new product developments reported that they were very busy at their booths.

King Tech Industries, a San Diego, California, based company, which maintains a cut-and-sew factory and textile lab in Shanghai, China, featured two of its most exciting new developments: HyGy Performance Fabric and KTTex reflective fabric.

The woven polyester HyGy is a lightweight single-layer protection fabric, that multi-tasks without resorting to a laminate that uses multiple layers to achieve various functions. Its maker claims that the product has superior performance and protection characteristics compared to other PTFE, TPU, or TPE fabrics typically used in today's popular hard-shell and soft-shell applications for the outdoor market.

Abrasion resistance, tear strength, UV resistance, absorbency, hot water/hot oil repellency, water resistance, and washability are among the performance qualities in which the single-layer HyGy out-performs its competition, said King Tech.

The protective fabric is also offered in combination with King Tech's KTTEx technology to add special reflective, safety and fashion functions to the already multifaceted HyGy.

The KTTEx graphic reflective technology imparts a soft, comfortable, and fashionable aspect to sportswear and safety clothing. The technology can be used on a variety of base cloths including polyester rip stop, stretchable cotton poplin, poly pongee, etc., King Tech noted. Special functions of the technology include a fashionable graphic appearance, a non-toxic quality, excellent washability, superior softness, and good fabric breathability.

A company that continues to push the envelope in the development of innovative

fabric solutions targeted towards industrial and military applications is Apex Mills Corp.

Priding itself in delivering application-driven solutions in response to customers' needs and newly arising opportunities, its broad expertise has been focused in supplying mesh, netting, spacer fabrics, and tricot knits to an ever expanding array of consumer, industrial and government related industries.

Adding to its already wide range of nylon and polyester knits and meshes, Apex introduced several new fabrics, featuring a variety of technical yarns including Nomex, antimicrobial, moisture management, basalt, ePTFE, and polyethylene. These products were specifically developed to address new challenges in the military, architecture, and geotextile sectors.

Joining the popular Amaretta microfibre leathers for the automotive and fashion industries from Kuraray America was Clarino, its new man-made leather and suede brand. The new material is aimed at high performance solutions in many industries, ranging from personal protection equipment, apparel, and footwear to industrial applications.

The extraordinary high-tech Clarino leather breathes naturally, feels luxuriously soft, and can be fashioned into a variety of deep rich colours. Made from extremely fine fibres, thousands of times finer than silk, the ultra-fine microfibrils make an extremely flexible fabric, with greater suppleness and softness. Both Amaretta and Clarino are wind, water, stain, and mildew resistant, which gives the fabric a broad range of potential applications.

Flame retardancy (FR) was one of the key fabric sectors at the show. Building on the success of its now popular Pro-C FR knit fabric, SSM Industries, Inc., introduced Pro-fil FR, which it claims takes FR protection to a new level.

The new Pro-fil FR fabrics are flame resistant without melt/drip, and are engineered for low dusting, low pilling, low surface friction, and can have a high sheen in a range of bright colours, including a 'true white'. According to Dianna McGee, customer service manager, ANSI 107 Hi-Visibility Standard can also be achieved, making the fabrics ideal for the fields where this is needed in addition to FR and Arc protection. Other benefits include low thermal shrinkage and high wicking.

SSM Pro-fil FR is available in a variety of knit and woven constructions, and in weight ranges as low as two ounces. All the fabrics are printable and highly UV resistant. Some suggested applications include garments requiring a combination of hi-visibility and Arc/FR protection, clean room and paint room garments, fire gear and coverall liners, racing driver and crew suits, next to skin garments, compression garments and underwear, and mattress ticking.

"SSM continuously researches the best and latest technologies in protective apparel, and delivers those technologies in the most wearable form so that the end-user won't mind wearing the garments even when the protection isn't needed," commented SSM president Scott Hilleary.

Taiwan-based Colotex Industrial Co., Ltd. introduced its X-odor fabric, made with a high performance fibre that has anti-odour, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, UV protection and static-free functions. The yarn is made in a high tech spinning system that combines the micro-pore silver fibres together. X-odor is a natural anti-microbial that guarantees the fibre inhibits the growth of odour, bacterial, and fungi in products, said the company. It also quickly absorbs and then neutralises ammonia, denatured proteins, and odour, keeping the wearer fresh and safe.

The distinguishing feature of the X-odor is that it contains multiple performance attributes, which are the properties of the yarn, and not a result of finishing processes or treatments.

Mesa Laminated Fabrics (MLF), based in Monrovia, California, manufactures industrial fabrics and laminated material for use in a wide variety of applications. MLF produces flexible, reinforced and non-reinforced laminates, including Urethanes (TPU), and High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE). The company's products are available with custom features, such as an exclusive vapour barrier for superior non-permeability rates, chemical compatibility and fire, ozone and UV resistance.

Standard product lines from MSL include Mesathane (TPU) and Mesalon (HDPE). In addition to producing these products, MLF responds to industry challenges by providing custom laminated fabrics for a variety of diverse applications.

At TechtexilNA, MFL featured its newly developed US Mining Safety & Health Administration (MSHA) approved fire resistant brattice cloth used for underground applications. (A brattice cloth is a fire-resistant fabric or plastic barrier used in a mine passage to confine the air and force it into the working place.) MFL also showed its new anti-static laminated TPU to meet the requirement standards for aboveground storage tanks.

DURO Textiles, the Fall River, Massachusetts, based textile producer has committed itself to developing innovative solutions to help customers differentiate

themselves in a global market. Through close collaboration, DURO's teams use its domestic research and development facilities to transform customer needs into leading edge solutions.

DURO used Techtexil to promote its recent innovative textile developments including fire retardancy, antimicrobial, reflective, ANSI Certified fabrics, and moisture management fabrics, many combined with its trademark DUROFast print colour technology.

The company also uses its independent New World Textile Testing Laboratory to test a variety of fabrics for the apparel, industrial, military, outdoor, and speciality textile sectors. This QLL (Qualified Laboratory List) certified government laboratory tests for abrasion, flammability, colourfastness, xenon weathering, fabric appearance, dimensional change, infrared reflectance, breathability, and military specifications.

Growing markets

This year's Techtexil event in Las Vegas was an extra event on the calendar. Organiser, Messe Frankfurt USA says that it was responding to the growing demand for technical textiles and nonwovens across the U.S. The company conducted an in-depth analysis of the attendee opportunity across the Western region. The research was focused on general technical textiles, agricultural, transportation, industrial and medical sectors.

Although this year's show had fewer exhibitors and attendees than anticipated, Messe Frankfurt says that its data shows the strength of the Western U.S. position among producers of high-performance fibres and textiles, identifying nearly 90,000 companies in the Western region.

According to its study, the largest concentrations of potential attendees within the focus sectors were California (41%), Texas (21%), Washington state (8%), and Colorado (7%).

Next year Techtexil North America returns to Atlanta where it will run in combination with the ATME-I/MEGATEX and SPESA Expo events.

● www.techtexilna.com



Rick Black, chief marketing officer for Performance Fibers delivering his keynote address at TTNA '09.