

SCANDINAVIAN BRANDS TAKE CENTRE STAGE

Nanotech treatments, moisture management fleeces and washable wool fabrics were some of the innovations on offer at this season's Outdoor Retailer Winter Market in Salt Lake City. **Kathy Swantko** reports

Participants at Outdoor Retailer Winter Market expect the outdoor market to maintain its strength through the economic downturn. Reflecting this confidence, the show saw 110 additional exhibitors.

However, not everything was on the up side. Show numbers indicated a slight softening in the market, with a reported decrease of approximately 5% in number of attendees. Attendance

was 16,500 and sold floor space, 330,000sq ft.

In spite of this, many attending retailers agreed that Outdoor

66° North Polartec fleece jacket



Retailer continues to be "the place to be" to do business for the coming year.

"Retailers need to be at this show," says Norman Cavallaro, president of Saybrook, Connecticut's, North Cove Outfitters. "I come here to talk with people about what's new both from a business standpoint and product standpoint. Besides doing business with current suppliers, I also come here to do business with new suppliers. I require that each of my staff finds at least one new product from a new company. They did that and more."

Also on the positive side, show organisers highlighted the new Scandinavian Village, sponsored by the Scandinavian Outdoor Group, (SOG), which included 30 leading Scandinavian brands, most of which were new exhibitors at the show.

"Scandinavian brands offer American retailers a whole new section of colours and styles from solid brands that have been around for more than 100 years," says Martin Kossler, chairman of the board for the Scandinavian Outdoor Group. "Beyond expanding distribution



into the US storefronts, our exhibitors are giving us great feedback about the orders being written and the networking opportunities here at Outdoor Retailer.”

One of the most interesting knit yarn/fabric technologies featured at the show was the line of sweater knit jackets from Dale of Norway, that use the company's new Knitshell technology.

According to Stig Furnes, director of product management, this technology begins with Dale of Norway's new nano-tech treated yarn, which makes the yarn water, snow and dirt repellent, as well as more durable. Through the yarn treatment process, the wool fibre maintains its natural softness and thermal ability, while providing its usual minimal pilling quality.

Dale knits the hi-tech wool yarn into rolls measuring 160cm wide and 80 metres long, before shipping it to Windstopper in Germany for lamination into a three-layer system, each layer adding its own functionality. The top layer is the water-repellent yarn from Dale of Norway. The middle layer is a windproof and water repellent membrane from Windstopper; and a flannel inner lining provides a soft, comfortable insulation. Once the three layers of the Knitshell fabric are laminated, the blend level of the finished fabric is 82% wool from Dale of Norway/3% Windstopper ePTFE/15% Windstopper polyester.

According to Mr Furnes, Dale of Norway's Knitshell products offer reliable protection from the windchill effect. As a result, the wearer can stay outside longer, enjoying an activity in a wide range of weather conditions.

Icelandic based company 66° North featured a number of fleece jackets with Polartec's Thermal Pro material with Power Stretch side and underarm panels for easy movement.

According to Helga Viðarsdóttir, marketing director for 66° North, the company uses a variety of Polartec products in all its fleece programs. Typically, these fleece fabrics are incorporated into its outer layer softshell, mid-layer, and a few baselayer products in the men's, women's and children's lines.

Technically, mid-layers incorporate Polartec in various weights to provide for a wide range of protection from the elements and give lightweight comfort.

Using capillary action, 66° North's mid-layers wick moisture away from the skin and draw it to the surface of the jacket. This moisture management and comfort quality prevents chills, and allows the wearer to stay outside for a longer period of time.

Polartec fleece products used in 66° North's jacket lines include Polartec Power Stretch, Polartec Thermal Pro, Polartec Wind Pro, Polartec Power Shield, Polartec Thermal Knit, and Polartec 100.

Washable wool

Vermont Organic Fiber Co used Outdoor Retailer to launch its new Washable O-Wool. Made with 100% certified organic Merino wool and blends, O-Wool washable yarns and fabrics are an exciting development and new offering in the area of organic textiles.

According to Matthew Mole, president of VTOF, the company's O-Wool washable fabrics and yarns use a hydrogen peroxide that is chlorine-free, along with a mechanical action treatment process to remove the outer scales of the wool fibre, which if left on normally cause felting and shrinking to occur. The process produces a functional, soft, and luxurious fibre, while at the same time reducing pilling and creating a fabric that meets the

Oeko-Tex 100 easy care washability standards.

For 2009, VTOF introduced O-Wool washable fabrics in three knit weights (150g/m², 230g/m², and 250g/m²) and constructions, along with a range of O-Wool washable yarns available in top dyed, package dyed, and skein dyed versions in natural 100% organic washable wool or 55% organic washable wool/45% cotton.

A highlight of the Outdoor Retailer Show for VTOF was that its new Washable O-Wool fabric was used by Curt Sousa, representing Los Angeles based FIDM, in his winning People's Choice Design in Outdoor Retailer's Project OR garment design competition, held as a special event at the show. The competition brings together five design students from top design colleges throughout the US to design and create a garment from concept to finished prototype in 48 hours.

“At VTOF, we've worked hard to create an excellent quality organic wool fabric that could be used as a base layer or a fashion fabric,” says Mr Mole. “The fact that O-Wool washable fabric was a big part of Curt Sousa's winning People's Choice design is testimony to the fabric's nice hand, usefulness, and high quality.” **KI**

Close-up view of water beading upon the surface of Dale of Norway's new Knitshell fabric

