

# OUTDOOR OPTIMISM

Polyester/Merino yarn innovations, technical base layer constructions and thermal insoles were among the developments at Outdoor Retailer Summer Market. **Kathlyn Swantko** reports

While there was optimism about the general state of the industry at this season's Outdoor Retailer Show, it was tempered by anxiety, at least for the first few days of the show, held in Salt Lake City from 21-24 July.

During days one and two, exhibitors were concerned about the possible bankruptcy of CIT Group Inc and the impact this would have on the supply chain. CIT is the major apparel industry factor to about 60% of textile/apparel companies, ranging from small start-ups to \$200m businesses. The entire supply chain is basically dependent on CIT for its working capital. Fortunately, by day three, this fear had subsided as CIT was saved by a \$3bn emergency loan from bondholders.

With this problem, at least temporarily, off exhibitors' minds, they were able to focus on some of the more positive signs surrounding the outdoor market.

"At this year's OR Summer Market, it was more apparent than ever that we, as an industry, have a strength and resilience in numbers. Despite

market conditions, the industry showed its innovative side," said Kenji Haroutunian, executive director of the Outdoor Retailer Show.

This statement was particularly true regarding innovative performance fabric developments and new innovations for the knitwear market. Key trends included new, unique sweater-knit assortments, combined with various weights in fleeces and sherpas; new sanded technical base layer fabrics; recycled fibres/yarns and

regenerated cottons; and

wool jerseys and fleeces. Knitting

International looks at these trends, along with other fibre, yarn, and fabric developments that generated interest at this season's show.

Two new yarns showcased by PrimaLoft at OR are allowing the company to venture into new markets. These are a 100% PrimaLoft yarn, and a re-engineered 50/50 PrimaLoft Merino blend yarn. Both yarns have applications for base layers and a variety of performance knit applications in the outdoor market.

"Base layers are an important comfort element for active individuals, and now they can enjoy the benefits of PrimaLoft yarn technology from

head to toe," said Ronald L. Comer, direct sales and marketing manager for the PrimaLoft yarn division.

The 100% PrimaLoft yarn is made from PrimaLoft micro denier polyester fibres, which are finer than cashmere fibres and provide a luxuriously soft next-to-skin quality. When paired with a hydrophilic yarn, the moisture repelling 100% PrimaLoft yarn transfers moisture vapour away from the skin to the fabric's outside surface, keeping skin dry, warm and comfortable.

## Merino blend

PrimaLoft Merino blend yarn is a blend of Merino wool and PrimaLoft fibres, which until now has been used primarily for socks, sweaters and accessories. The re-engineered 50/50 blend of Merino wool and PrimaLoft has been designed to offer superior wicking properties for base layer applications through the company's new Quick Draw Technology, PrimaLoft's proprietary moisture management system.

Concept III has been pioneering surface finished fabrics for years. It's new "Sweater Stitch" collection is the company's most recent contribution in this category of fabric constructions.

David Parkes, president of Concept III, said: "Technical 'Sweater Stitch' fabrics that perform and are washable are so important for us. And we have six other things still in the hopper in this surface-stitch area that emphasise colour, stitch-knit construction, and pattern work."

Other knit developments important for Concept III include technical base layer fabrics, sanded on one or both sides;



**Thinsulate four-layer insulated insole**

plush velboa fabrics, both single face and double face; wool jerseys and wool blend fleeces; and eco-friendly knits containing recycled polyester or regenerated cotton.

Swiss-based Klingler Asia Ltd has been producing knitted fabrics in Asia for about four years. George Wells, president of European Textile Trading Corp and sales agent for Klingler fabrics in the US said: "The knitted fabrics currently generating interest for this season include knit-to-knit laminates, woven-to-knit laminates, 100% polyester pile, and recycled polyester. The bonded constructions can be manufactured with or without a waterproof/breathable bonding agent."

Designed for comfort and made for warmth, 3M introduced its new Thinsulate thermal insoles featuring a patented component bonding process, combined with moisture management and odour protection for all types of cold weather footwear. The new line of thermal insoles is made by combining performance materials, which creates a multi-layer barrier to help keep feet warm and dry.

**Thermal insoles**

Thinsulate thermal insoles are made up of four layers. The top layer is an abrasion resistant fabric, improving durability and containing X-Static silver antimicrobial technology to reduce odour. The second is foot-conforming foam – to provide additional comfort. A third layer, made of Thinsulate insulation, bonds the comfort layer and bottom layer, providing exceptional warmth. A patented foam in the bottom layer absorbs shock, provides energy return, wicks moisture and includes additional antimicrobial technology to inhibit odour-causing bacteria, according to the company.

"There has been market demand for an insole that provides not only comfort but additional warmth," said Jeff Gunia, marketing manager for Thinsulate insulation. "For those working in or enjoying the outdoors, Thinsulate thermal insoles provide a quick and easy solution for consumers to enhance warmth and comfort during their outdoor activity."

Using the OR Show to rebrand its popular Lycra fibre, Invista launched two new innovations for activewear socks: Lycra Sport Fabric and Lycra Energy fabrics. Socks with Lycra Sport fabric must meet Invista standards for premium



Examining fabric samples at Outdoor Retailer Summer Market

foot-hugging power, lasting fit, and comfort. Lycra Energy fabrics are engineered to achieve the physiological benefits of graduated compression in the lower leg, with higher compression at the ankle and gradually decreasing compression up the calf. The socks must be designed in calf length to meet Invista standards.

Denise Sakuma, Invista's global segment director for apparel and legwear, explained: "Our new performance products for socks maximise our global experience in performance fabric development, and expand our offerings for the burgeoning 'active wellness' category for socks." **KI**



PrimaLoft baselayer