

Future promise

Fabric innovations lead recovery at Outdoor Retail Summer Market '11, writes **Kathlyn Swantko**

The frothy look of this Daijin 'cloud fleece' from Concept III Textiles belies its excellent abrasion rating, washability and superior warmth to weight ratio

Based on the energy

and excitement displayed at this season's Outdoor Retailer show, you would never know that the US market and the world are suffering through one of the toughest economic downturns in decades. Approximately 25,000 retailers, exhibitors and media attended the record-breaking Summer Market, held from August 4 – 7 in Salt Lake City, Utah. According to show



70-denier power spandex/poly prints using disperse dyes. This fabric for the cycle/ski markets can be printed using either of two PFP vehicles, sublimation printing or digital printing

organisers, the four-day event saw increases in every category, including exhibitor booth space, exhibiting brands and attendance, with most categories posting double-digit growth.

"The outdoor industry has been resilient during recession times and that dynamic, combined with the popularity of the active outdoor lifestyle, has fuelled even higher interest in the outdoor market," said Outdoor Retailer show director Kenji Haroutunian. "The technology, innovation and youthful energy evident at the show are exactly what businesses want to bring to their customers!"

On the textile side, businesses see the rising raw material costs of earlier this year as stabilising, and increased US textile production is anticipated.

"Things are beginning to happen back here in

the US," explained David Parkes, president of Concept III Textiles, based in New Jersey. "If we can approach this issue intelligently without emotion and really address what we can do in the US, I believe that over the next five years we're going to see textile production come back to this country."

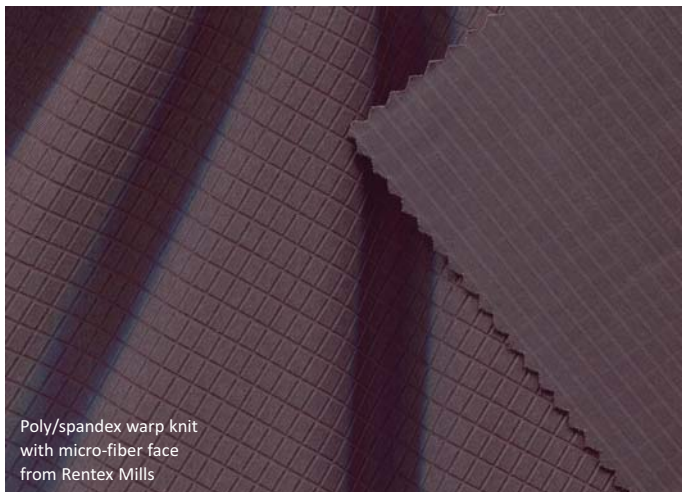
While textile product development and innovation has suffered somewhat over the past few years, there are indications that with the return of US production, there may be an increase in new product development going forward.

Parkes cited a few trends that he sees as holding promise for future innovation and product development. Some of the fabric advancements include: 1) the development of new lining fabrics for garments with texture/surface interest focused on the inside of the garment; 2) new advances in Merino wool blends, which will minimise cost; 3) the use of new shapewear fabrics for base layer applications and activewear; 4) innovations in bonded/laminated lighter-weight wovens; and 5) an emphasis on sustainability in production, through the implementation of new water/energy conservation processes.

Innovative imitation furs are more luxurious and more real looking than ever before

Fashion and function

An important trend for this autumn/winter that



Poly/spandex warp knit with micro-fiber face from Rentex Mills



Stretch moisture management warp knit from Rentex Mills

falls into Parkes' new liner-fabrics category, and is also showing up on the fashion side on the runways of both Europe and the US, is the use of faux furs for sportswear and outerwear. Thanks to advances in faux fur production processes, these innovative imitation furs are more luxurious and more real looking than ever before.

As suppliers evaluate the areas for potential product development, they are working more closely than ever before with their client partners to develop customised products. Suppliers are also using their production capabilities more efficiently, to create not only stylish faux fur patterns and designs for the fashion market, but also to develop more functional fabrics for the performance fabric market.

Glenoit Fabrics, a sliver knitter based in Tarboro, Tennessee, is a one cut-pile fabric manufacturer that is maximising its equipment to create new and interesting sliver knits to service a variety of markets.

"Our knitting machines have jacquard capabilities," explained Glenoit CEO Bill Trienekens. "While this capability was originally envisioned as a design capability, we think this technique can provide an extension to function as well. It allows us to precisely place different slivers, either for colour, look, function or a combination of these qualities. For example, one set of sliver might be blended for optimum wicking capability, while another set might be used to create a lofty spacer effect, and still another to communicate a logo or pattern."

Additional features

Like David Parkes, Trienekens believes that a great deal of newness can be created through the use of pile, faux fur fabrics on the lining side. He said: "The next dimension for faux furs will be in the backing yarn construction for inside liners. We can create function, stretch, durability, or even flame retardant performance through the selection of the backing yarn."

As an additional dimension, Glenoit has a foam coating process that offers a range of preferences. Trienekens explained: "Our foam coating capability can serve the simple function as a binder for the sliver pile; as the carrier base for added substances to create certain performance characteristics; to form exotic applications for micro capsules of active agents like odour control, phase change temperature control; or to incorporate additional benefits like silver or copper components into the fabric."

According to Trienekens, once all the substrate components and fibre placements are determined, Glenoit's extensive in-house finishing capabilities can add a further level of



Light as a feather, Schoeller's Ultralight Soft Protection (USP) fabrics are extremely comfortable and offer wind/rain repellency

uniqueness to the fabric that can range from the recognised Berber and Sherpa finishes to shearing, napping, and needle-punching techniques.

Warp-knit creations

Rentex Mills, a circular and warp knitter, dyer, and finisher, based in Mont-Royal, Quebec, Canada, has made a significant investment in creative product developments, particularly in the warp knit area. New Rentex warp-knit developments include textured micro denier poly/spandex warp knits with push-pull moisture management qualities for the cycling/triathlon applications, and a 70-denier prepared-for-print (PFP) matt power poly/spandex fabric for the cycling and ski markets, and possibly for base layer applications.

Rentex is also receiving tremendous interest in two of its newer stock fabrics, which include a soft, brushed non-pill polyester warp knit with very high abrasion resistance for collars, cuffs, waistbands, pocketing, and liner applications; and a non-pill brushed mesh warp knit with moisture wicking, abrasion resistant, and great air permeability qualities for liner, pocketing, and medical applications.

A protective shield

On the woven side, Schoeller's newest development is its Ultralight Soft Protection (USP) technology, which offers comfort and softness in next-to-skin applications, such as leisurewear, sportswear, urban wear, and a variety of outdoor apparel end-uses. "Our USP by Schoeller-fabrics have no effect on the fabrics' original feel or weight," explained marketing manager Shannon Walton. "The ultra-light protective shield has a natural breathability and feels great against the skin with no lining needed. It also protects against rain and wind." ■



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