



Happy 50th, Gore page 33

It was 50 years ago when Bill Gore left DuPont and founded his own company. Now, W.L. Gore is a \$2 billion enterprise led by its iconic product, Gore-Tex.

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Fabric Corner Turning 50: Gore Builds Brand Through Product, Relationships

BY ERIC STEELE

Fifty years ago Bill Gore left DuPont to start his own company making products from Teflon, the synthetic he developed, and W.L. Gore was born. Over the years the brand has matured into a global company with four divisions and \$2 billion in revenue.

Here at the show, the company is celebrating its 50th birthday at Booths #33041/34038.

But Gore's secret to its success goes far beyond Gore-Tex, the trademarked, waterproof and breathable fabric that's become the standard for technical outdoor gear and apparel.

Gore has developed strong relationships that have relied on the reputation of its products, which have expanded beyond the original Gore-Tex.

"First and foremost, we offer the value of the brand. And the brand is built on an authentic technology that has been around 30-some-odd years," said Gore associate Mark Yardley. "It's a technology that has evolved over time. The original Gore-Tex was launched in 1976. I can't tell you how many times we've evolved that laminate, but the evolution has been based on endless hours of testing, learning and field-testing for specific end uses. We never sit on our laurels. We're always trying to perfect our products so they meet the needs of all of our end users."

As a result, Gore has become a stamp of excellence that can lend credence to lesser-known brands thanks to its instant brand trust and recognition.

"We were excited to be awarded the Gore-Tex license in Inov8's early years because we wanted to offer a waterproof product. It's especially important for trail footwear. Getting the Gore-Tex license was important to us because of the brand recognition," said Lisa Mikkelsen, president of U.S. distribution for Inov8, a British running shoe company looking to make inroads in the North American market.

But building a groundbreaking technology was not enough for Gore. It had to go to market and inform the consumer.

"Anybody can build the best widget out there," said Yardley. "But unless people understand the importance of

that widget, or how that widget works, or why a consumer would want that widget, it's not going to sell. So, the only way to be successful is to invest in your customers and the consumers.

Take the time to educate them on the technology, and why it's important for them in their end use."

That means offering extensive training for retailers and reps.

"We do a lot of training," Yardley added. "We are finding more and more that we are spending time at our customers' sales meetings training their reps. We focus in on their key retailers and sometimes bring their retailers back to

Gore for training."

For reps, this training can be invaluable in explaining the differences between similar waterproof fabrics.

"They have a really good training package for our reps who need to learn more about the product and how to compete with other waterproof membranes," Mikkelsen said.

Brands with minimal name recognition like Inov8 get a big boost from Gore's training. But major outdoor brands like Merrell, exhibiting at Booth #32300, also benefit.

"We have been a partner with Gore for over 20 years," said Craig Throne, vice president of global marketing for Merrell. "As the Merrell brand expands, so does our use of Gore-Tex. Most recently, we incorporated Gore-Tex into our inaugural line of Merrell apparel and we will continue to use it throughout both the Merrell apparel and footwear lines. At Merrell, we choose our partners carefully to reflect our brand's goals, and matching the Gore name with our brand makes a clear distinction to the consumer of high-quality outdoor footwear and apparel."

Gore works with manufacturers to develop supporting advertising and point-of-purchase materials that generate pull at the retail level. The hang-tag swings many sales.

But perhaps the ultimate testament to Gore's longevity and brand recognition is that customers come into specialty retail stores requesting a branded ingredient instead of a brand. If that's a measure of success, Gore has definitely accomplished it.



Gore-Tex branding helped Inov8, a British running shoe company, gain brand recognition in the U.S. market.

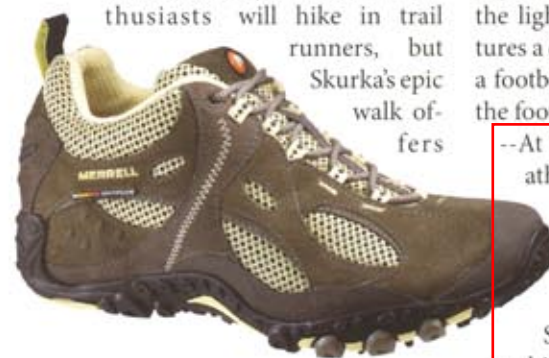
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Hiking Footwear Brands Hone In on Lightweight, Versatility

BY GARETT GRAUBINS

When perusing the hiking shoes on the show floor, keep the name of Andrew Skurka in mind. In 2007, when Skurka hiked the Great Western Loop, a 6,875-mile link-up of trails in the Western United States, he didn't wear ankle-hugging leather boots. He wore trail-running shoes.

Of course, only a select few enthusiasts will hike in trail runners, but Skurka's epic walk offers



Merrell Chameleon Arc Wind

some insights to trends within the category.

First, avoid footwear overkill. Second, lightweight is better. Sleek, lightweight mid- and low-cuts are preferable to the two-pound clunkers of yesteryear. And this trend is playing out in the hiking shoes on display on the floor.

"The hiking category has been shifting from the more traditional heavy leather boot toward a lightweight, athletically-inspired category that draws a lot from beefier trail-running shoes," said Jonathan Lantz, president of La Sportiva.

This lightweight trend also coincides with the industry's desire to find a younger hiking audience.

"Twenty-somethings don't want to look like me, they want to have their own look and feel," said Yahn Lebo, strategic business unit manager for Outventure at Merrell.

Companies also are aiming to reposition hiking as an activity that is not defined by multi-week excursions on the Appalachian Trail. Instead, Lebo said, consumers are "thinking 'I want to go now and I want to have a piece of versatile footwear that I can wear on the drive up there and at the restaurant afterwards—and that can take the conditions on the trail.'"

With that in mind, here are some highlights of the hiking shoes pushing the sport's envelope at the show:

• At Booth #32200 Hi-Tec has fused its trail-running technology with its backpacking heritage to deliver streamlined light hikers like the V-Lite Hornet

and Natal Low WP. Look for an unprecedented number of women's-specific light hikers as well.

• Inov-8 brings its trail expertise to hiking with the launch of the Roclite 370 at Booth #32540. The British company believes it's the lightest boot on the market.

• Keen knows comfort and is bringing that ease-of-wear to the trails with the light-hiking Redmond, which features a durable suede-leather upper and a footbed that contours to the shape of the foot. Take a look at Booth #32301.

--At Booth #5027, La Sportiva touts athletic performance with its FC (Flex Control) Series. The lightweight FC 3.0 GTX focuses on flexibility with a Vibram River Impact Brake System outsole for traction and cushioning.

• The Lowa Zephyr GTX Mid is designed as a crossover between beefier backpacking models and more all-around, everyday shoes. Take a look at Booth #34129.

• At Booth #32300, Merrell continues to "modernize" hiking with the Chameleon line of women's-specific, contemporary light hikers that blend all-day comfort with a go-anywhere look. On the men's side, check out the Epic Riot, described as a progressive version of the traditionally popular Merrell Moab.

• The burly and popular Montrail Hardrock extends into the light hiker category with the Hardrock Mid 09 GTX. All of the hallmarks of Montrail's trail history are here, but on steroids: Gryptonit rubber, underfoot protection and ample stability for those pushing the pace with and without a pack. Take a look at Booth #26013.

• At Booth #13027, Patagonia Footwear is introducing the Boaris, which sports a clean, less-is-more look. The Poli-Cork footbed and 100 percent recycled insole continue the company's sustainability mission.

• Salomon, at Booth #32201, brings its lightweight trail-running know-how to light hiking with the Exit GTX, which couples a waterproof bootie construction with comfortable style.

• The North Face's Adversary GTX combines waterproof, breathable Gore-Tex with a Vibram outsole into a sporty, highly durable package. The Minx GTX is a women's day hiker that provides maximum agility and responsiveness, also with a waterproof, breathable Gore-Tex membrane. Check them out at Booth #MR250A.