



What's in a name: Cambrelle

1990 was probably the first time that someone had run the Boston Marathon in stylish dress shoes. Coming home in the top 5%, Tony Post beat some 24,000 other runners wearing conventional running shoes and trainers. It caused something of a sensation at the time, but it made more of an impression on the footwear industry, which wanted to know more about the construction used in the classic wingtip Rockport shoe that Post was wearing.

One of its principal comfort components was Cambrelle, a shoe lining manufactured in a beautiful part of the English landscape, Cumbria, famous for its outdoor way of life, trekking and fell walking around the Lake District. The fabric had no trouble coping with the marathon—after all its abrasion resistance remains one of its key features.

Cambrelle came out of the research laboratories of ICI in the late 1960s, when ICI was one of the world's chemical giants, on a par with DuPont in the USA. Most of the world's man-made fibres in the immediate post World War II era were developed by the two companies. They already shared the science that had developed nylon and polyester, and it was they who licensed other companies, then developing internationally, to produce fibres based on the same patents.

Two variations of nylon were attracting the attention of the ICI chemists, nylon 6 and nylon 6.6. At the same time, they were experimenting with extrusion systems and someone had the idea of

wrapping the one nylon around a core of the other. The experiment was a success, the technicians had proved it could be done and the marketing people were informed.

It was then that some head-scratching began as they contemplated what it could be used for. But it was soon found that the fibre had a special property—it could be thermally point-bonded. The outer sheath melted at a lower temperature than the core, providing consistency in production and leaving the core nylon unaffected and so creating small cushions between the bonds. There was no need to weave the fibre and it worked superbly as a nonwoven. It was also quickly found that the nonwoven had tremendous absorption capacity. It could store moisture between the fibres and could absorb up to three times its own dry weight in moisture before it felt damp.

There was no doubt in ICI's corporate hierarchy that its research laboratory had come up with an interesting fibre but, as it wasn't a market-driven development, it was not sure what to do with it. The board's decision was to hivel it off from the company's main fibre business, set up a

Export performance has won
Camtex the Queen's Award
for Exports twice



separate company and let it follow its own commercial destiny. If it succeeded, so much the better as it would feed its profits into the main divisional accounts; if it didn't, not much damage would be caused and no one would pay much attention. Thus, in 1969 Camtex Fabrics Ltd. was formed to produce Cambrelle and the company gradually transferred its base to the small Cumbrian town of Workington,

which welcomed the arrival of fresh industry to the area.

Making a footprint in the market

The product range for which the Camtex people considered Cambrelle might be suitable was extremely varied—attaché cases, hats, pyjamas, battery sleeves, pushchairs and prams, linings for plastic tunnels used by growers, liners which could hold moisture in plant nurseries, window blinds, duvets for storing potatoes... and then someone thought about shoe linings. The trials were outstanding and as the saying goes "the rest is history".

As was proved in the Boston Marathon, Cambrelle's abrasion resistance is one of its key features—(after 120,000 rubs on a Martindale tester, technicians used to turn the machine off, probably out of boredom) and its pique, bark weave and fine weave designs have become globally recognised



for their quality and endurance. The bi-component fibres allow the lining to constantly adapt to the motion of the foot and the footwear, whilst its moisture management properties keep the feet dry, cool, and comfortable. It protects the shoe itself as the lining helps to prevent staining of the upper caused by excess moisture and prevents the build up of bacteria that can cause mildew, rot and odour.

But far from basking in the glory of creating a successful product, Camtex has continued to develop new innovations and versions of Cambrelle to meet the wide-ranging needs of the footwear industry. Cambrelle+ Amicor offers extra protection against bacteria that can cause odours and mildew. This product uses a specialty fibre with locked in anti-bacterial and anti-fungal agents, which is particularly suited to athletic shoes, outdoor boots and work boots as well as casual footwear. The company also produces linings that meet the stringent PPE standards demanded in the modern work place. Designed for industrial situations where conductive footwear is required to reduce the risk of spark ignition through electrostatic build up, Cambrelle Conduct combines the abrasion resistance and wicking properties of Cambrelle with special metallic fibres and exceeds the European Standard EN344-1. Whilst this standard requires that the electrical resistance of a final shoe should not exceed 100k ohms, in tests—carried out by SATRA—Cambrelle Conduct produced an average electrical resistance of below 10k ohms. The company's latest development has been to combine the performance of Cambrelle with X-Static—The Silver Fiber—to add further benefits

Advanced quality control methods ensure absolute consistency in point-bonding.



to the linings, integrating the durability and wicking properties of Cambrelle with the anti-odour, anti-microbial and anti-static properties of X-Static.

Lining the wrong pockets

As many companies have discovered in the modern world of business, developing an effective product that is in demand and is well-recognised can also create problems. Cambrelle's products have not gone unnoticed and although the company supplies world-leading footwear brands such as adidas, Rockport, Puma,

Ecco, Scarpa, and Kickers as a result of its success, quality and innovation; it has also attracted a great deal of undesired attention... from counterfeiters. Cambrelle became so successful that it quickly established a leading position in the world of shoe-linings and it wasn't long before other companies began to develop inferior imitations, despite the fact that Cambrelle is protected by law in over 70 countries around the world, including the all-important United States of America where consumer protection against passing-off and counterfeiting is taken very seriously.

Although some say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery (you know you have a success when others try to imitate you and your name), counterfeit products have caused serious problems for Camtex. Not only do 'fake' products affect the sales of the company's genuine products (and, in essence, steal the technology that has been developed through years' of research and investment), they also jeopardise the reputation of Cambrelle linings as they do not offer Cambrelle's level of performance.

The company has addressed this issue with vigour and has taken steps to protect its products through prosecuting companies that have been discovered infringing its trademarks. Following one such lawsuit, Kieran O'Hare, managing director of Camtex Fabrics, said, "Our decision to take such severe action has been done to protect ourselves and for the benefit of the customers. Cambrelle is associated with high standards and when someone purchases a product containing Cambrelle they expect the best possible quality from their footwear, something that none of the counterfeit Cambrelle products are able to offer."

Furthermore, with the large-scale shift in footwear production to China, Camtex has also expanded its marketing efforts in China in order to encourage Chinese manufacturers to use Cambrelle's genuine, high quality linings.

Keeping one step ahead

The story of Camtex's rise to success from a small base in Cumbria to become a global brand recognised for quality and innovation is inspiring in the 'globalised' industry of today. In addition, thanks to the company's constant innovation and its tireless efforts to protect itself against counterfeiting, the path ahead looks very bright indeed. 

The web after point-bonding by calender

