



Eye-catching. The Sorel Caribou Stingray boot made from stingray leather, with just one pearl-effect eye from the fish's spine per pair, is a carry-over from autumn 2010.

CREDIT: SOREL

Sorel steps into spring

US-based outdoor footwear brand Sorel has launched its first ever spring collection for the 2011 season. The new collection was on display at the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market exhibition in Salt Lake City in August.

"Sorel is known for being a rugged winter boot," the company said on announcing the new set of boots and shoes, "but we now also have vintage-inspired sneakers with hints of the boot heritage such as full-grain leather and contrast stitching."

The company's Anna Sanford explains that Sorel's focus on cold-weather boots is part of its heritage. Acquired ten years ago by Columbia Sportswear, it started out as a specialist, small brand in a lumber town of the same name in Canada. Serious expansion of the collection began to

Once a winter-only brand, Sorel has launched its first spring collection for 2011. New sneakers and rain-boots inherit many of the brand's ruggedly attractive trademark silhouettes and design elements.

happen in autumn 2010. "We took the brand in a new direction," Ms Sanford says, "using different elements for us such as faux fur and some nice new stitching work. We also had some really high-end products, such as a version of one of our brand's most traditional boots, the Caribou, made from stingray leather."



Traditional elements from Sorel's outdoor, winter heritage are part of the spring collection, including rubber on the outsole and leather in many of the uppers.

CREDIT: SOREL

Sting in the tail

The Caribou Stingray has large quantities of natural black rubber on the area from toe to heel, as well as a chunky, outdoor black rubber sole. But the rest of the upper is dominated by stunning black stingray leather, with the natural pearl effect of the skin contributing to the boot's classy look, without detracting too much from a rugged appeal enhanced by black fur-effect trims. For a retail price of around \$800 per pair, you would expect some special touches, and with the Caribou Stingray Sorel does not disappoint; the most impressive of all is that there is only one 'eye' - that part of the leather that shows off the white pearls on the fish's spine per pair, so one boot has it and its partner does not. This imbalance serves to reinforce the authentic nature of this special product: if you were going to use synthetic material, or even bovine leather coated and finished to reproduce the look of stingray leather, you would be tempted to make the boots an exact mirror image of each other.

"We're carrying the Caribou Stingray on," Anna Sanford says. "They've been very popular. They are such a special and original product; even the box they come in is beautiful."

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Spring in Sorel's step

The carry-over Caribous form part of what she refers to as "sidebar seasons", ones that footwear retailers use to keep important brands in stock for most of the year. When autumn-winter is over, some Sorel shoes and boots will still sell and partner retailers want to keep them in stock. In the context of the brand's first ever spring line, though, the importance of this, and other carry-over products (such as the Firenzy Breve low boot), is that they have paved the way for a warmer weather collection.

Ms Sanford describes sneaker products in the collection, including the Sentry range, as fresh and hip, with plenty of Sorel's trademarks on display. Toes in natural rubber are a good example, as is the distinctive stitching patterns the designers have dictated on canvas and leather. The Sentry range includes sneakers, chukka boots and tassel loafers for men, with similar styles for women who, in addition, have classic broad-strapped Mary Jane sneakers to pick from. Colour combinations include contrasting uppers and linings, as well as laces that complement rather than match (cream laces with russet brown uppers, or cherry red with elephant-skin grey, for example).

Laughter in the rain

Also in the collection are a selection of more rugged boots for men, such as the Kingston Chukka and the Brimley. Here, leather predominates more in the uppers and colours cinnamon, bark, mud and black carry a stronger outdoor message.

Attractive and colourful rain-boots make up the inaugural Sorel spring collection for women. The brand's message to accompany these is this: "Rainy days may be dreary, but that doesn't mean your footwear has to give in to the glum. Give 'drab' the boot with bright, sassy kicks that carry serious performance cred."

With a moulded rubber outsole inspired by the classic 1964 pac boot, this new generation "rejects rain" while wrapping the wearer's feet in colours that are "flat-out fun". They have rubber-coated canvas uppers and a patent leather shell to keep feet dry and warm, while the footbed is removable so you can air it out to keep it fresh. The boots have black-and-white polka-dot linings to add what Sorel calls "unexpected flair" and each pair comes with an extra pair of laces in a contrasting colour to add some variety if the spring rainy season lasts too long. In theory you can keep them on all day – Anna Sanford says she has been doing exactly this with a pair she has tried out.

Colours for the Tivoli Rain model include nautical blue, Formula One red, and spectra yellow. The Tivoli Race boots are lighter in weight and have a technical textile breathable mesh in the upper, but are no less colourful, with a pagoda blue and lime green combination among the options.

Sorel sums up its first spring collection as consisting of "the work boot made beautiful" and the sneaker "refined and re-envisioned". It is unlikely to have gone to so much trouble for just one year. 🌧️