



Heading for an adventure – Teva's Forge Pro with downhill traction.

CREDIT: TEVA

Ideas flow for watersports footwear

Outdoor footwear brands Teva and Sperry Top-Sider can each lay claim to a long tradition of making shoes for people to wear in and around water.

Teva's fame comes from inventing the sports sandal after a guide working on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon, Mark Thatcher, felt the need for shoes that he could wear for river rafting with good enough drainage and adequate support in key areas, especially the ankle, to allow him to keep them on his feet in and out of the water. Unable to find what he was looking for, he made the first Teva sandal himself. That was in 1984. Just one year later, Deckers Outdoor Corporation (the parent company of brands as diverse as UGG Australia, Tsubo and Simple Shoes) began licensing the new sandals, leading to a surge in sales and popularity. The relationship continued until the end of 2002, when Deckers acquired the Teva brand outright.

Two iconic footwear brands with a penchant for leisure in and around water have come up with new ideas to keep product innovation flowing.

The history of Sperry Top-Sider is longer, dating back to 1935, no less. Founder, Paul Sperry, was a keen sailor but he also had a passion for inventing (for example, he once owned the patent for a wooden decoy duck, of the kind hunters use). One day, he was walking by the ocean in Connecticut with his dog, a cocker spaniel named Prince. He became fascinated by the dog's ability to run on freezing water and ice without slipping and, on examining Prince's paws closely, saw that there were hundreds of

tiny lines and grooves going in all directions. This became the inspiration for the slip-resistant sole of the first boat shoe, the Authentic Original Sperry Top-Sider.

Ongoing development

Development at both brands has been ongoing. Teva has just launched its spring-summer 2011 collection at the industry's summer exhibitions, Outdoor in Friedrichshafen in mid-July and Outdoor Retailer Summer Market in Salt Lake City at the start of August.

The brand aims itself particularly at people who love to have fun in the outdoors and is, naturally, emphasising fun in and around water for spring-summer next year.

Examples of the shoes that feature in the new collection include the Gnarkosi, which the company says is packed full of Teva technologies including Tide Grip for traction, Tide Hydro for drainage and Tide Comfort for protection against the discomfort seams can cause in shoes. Drain frame perforations in the toe and heel ensure water picked up in rivers, lakes and elsewhere will drain away quickly. It also has a Spider Original rubber outsole to offer a high level of grip on rocks and riverbeds. Its wider, flatter sole provides maximum surface contact for high performance grip and stability.

Drainage everywhere

Deckers Europe's brand co-ordinator, Steve Lime, says of the Gnarkosi: "There is drainage everywhere. This shoe will not absorb any water thanks to the drain frame system. But, at the same time, kayaking shoes haven't typically looked appealing. This is something you can keep on when you've come out of the water, put your jeans on and are having a couple of beers."

The Tirra, a women's shoe for summer travel, trekking or casual use, has been an overwhelming success in the 2010 Teva range so the company has decided to continue with it for 2011 with colour updates. Steve Lime points to other collection highlights that are specifically for women. The Mush is a Teva classic, but he says it's more "women



Perfectly positioned pods and pads on the outer and inner sole of Sperry Top-Sider shoes allow watersports enthusiasts to feel their way around tricky terrain.

CREDIT: SPERRY TOP-SIDER

specific" in this latest incarnation. The memory-foam footbed is still there, but Teva's design team has redone the lasts it used for Mush this time to make the shape and the fit more appropriate for women's feet and there is a wide enough choice of colours for a Mush display to look like an ice-cream parlour.

The collection also contains the Churn, a multi-sport shoe that houses the same raft of Teva water management technology. The shoe is extremely breathable, quick-drying and perfectly designed to cope in wet environments.

It is one of many Teva products to feature Shoc Pad, a polyurethane-EVA unit in the heel cup that transfers the energy of impact throughout the footbed and away from the heel. The heel folds down, making it easy to slip the shoe on and off and even offering the option of wearing it like a heel-less shoe. The points Steve Lime makes about this are that everything on the Churn shoe is quick-drying and it's a shoe with "a great traction story for grip on the rocks". He also likes its one-handed tightening system.

There are trail shoes in the range, suitable for light hiking: the Raith for men and the Sky Lake for women. "They are the direct descendants of the Riva and the Dalea, respectively, from our autumn 2010 collection," Mr Lime continues. "Those shoes have been great sellers and we wanted to carry them through." Differences include using Spider outsoles in this model in 2011 instead of Vibram (the company uses technology from both sole providers right across its range), and bringing in some new colours for spring, including the interestingly named ginger root.

Other products to feature are the Forge Pro, which provides downhill traction in the sole and, especially, in a redesigned heel that has reverse lugging, and the Itunda, another carry-over product from 2010. Teva describes the latter as a true amphibian, an epithet that is justified in Steve Lime's book because the Itunda is "a high-performance



The Gnarkosi, appealing in and out of the water. CREDIT: TEVA



river sandal and a high-performance outdoor sandal at the same time”.

Another highlight is the Lumen, a light sandal in more ways than one. The company says the Lumen was inspired by surfers “who can’t wait for sunrise to seek the perfect wave” and has a detachable light on the cross-strap of every shoe to let wearers see rocks, stones or other obstacles as they head down to the beach at first light with the power to “glow from below”.

See with your feet

Ironically, the same dilemma has inspired the latest Sperry innovation too. The company has put “sensory technology” into its collection for next spring and summer.

Called SON-R, the new footwear technology owes nothing to sound waves and everything to the super sensitivity we have in our feet, even if we seldom use it.

The idea consists of putting anatomically positioned pods in an ultra-flexible outsole to work in concert with a textured polyurethane insole containing independent chambers that respond to the pressure exerted on the foot. This enhances a person’s ability to send sensory feedback to the brain and allows wearers to feel, think and react to the terrain beneath their feet, giving them better stability and balance. This outsole-insole combination can create similar tactile sensations to being barefoot, while delivering comfort, protection and wet-dry traction.

Shoes in the first Sperry Top-Sider collection equipped with SON-R include the appropriately named Feedback (faithful to the principle, although with fewer bumps on the insole and, therefore, priced more competitively), open and closed versions of the Ping, with slightly different men’s and women’s versions, the women’s with an attractive zig-zag

Glow from below. The new Lumen is a flip-flop with a detachable light on the strap. It allows surfing enthusiasts to find their way safely to the shore before first light.

CREDIT: TEVA

pattern on the strap and with extra cushioning to allow all-day wear, and Bearing Booties, again with versions for men and women. The shoes have internal drainage, antimicrobial components and breathable hydrophobic meshes to encourage quick drying. The new collection will be available in outdoor specialty, marine and sporting goods stores starting in spring 2011.

The company’s contention is that, with this patent-pending sensory feedback system, based on putting pods and pads in the perfect places in the inner and outer sole of the shoe, watersports enthusiasts will be able to navigate their way across difficult under-foot terrain without looking down. Whether on slippery rocks while carrying a canoe, negotiating rough and hidden underwater surfaces at steep put-ins while kayaking, or on the slick fibreglass surface of a boat, Sperry says it has engineered a system that creates a safer and more enjoyable experience in, on and around the water.

Brand president, Craig Reingold, said at the time of the launch: “Just as a submarine uses sonar to navigate uncharted waters, our SON-R footwear technology provides sensory feedback to what is underfoot and lets the individual see with their feet to better feel the terrain beneath them and adjust and improve agility and stability in the often challenging terrain that comes with multi-water sport activities. These ground-breaking new shoes allow the wearer to focus on performance and enjoyment of the sport, rather than worry about the challenges of complex terrain.”