

Success for Reebok with its EasyTone and ZigTech has meant success for key suppliers, including the US company ATP Manufacturing. The insole manufacturer has been able to expand its production base, opening a new manufacturing unit in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.



Actress Eva Mendes sporting the latest footwear and apparel from Reebok's EasyTone collection.

CREDIT: REEBOK

Adidas award makes a world of difference to ATP

The winner of a supplier performance award from adidas in 2010 has described in detail the difference the honour has made to its business.

Cast polyurethane insole manufacturer ATP Manufacturing received the Adidas Group Performance Award for Quality from adidas chief executive, Herbert Hainer, at the 2010 Adidas Supplier Summit in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in November. ATP was selected for the work it carried out in the development, support and growth of adidas brand Reebok's EasyTone and ZigTech footwear. The award is traditionally presented to suppliers who provide outstanding customer service,

top-quality products, on-time delivery, problem resolution and advanced concept engineering.

The popularity of the EasyTone and ZigTech shoes has gained greater levels of attention for Reebok within the adidas group, and for the Performance Award for Quality to go to a Reebok supplier is a reflection of this. The quality of the insoles is of great importance in these two footwear products.

Sole magic

EasyTone shoes have special pods in the outer sole; Reebok argues that the "micro-instability" this creates



The unusually shaped sole of the ZigTech absorbs the impact of heel strike and sends a wave of energy along the shoe to propel the wearer forward.

CREDIT: ADIDAS GROUP

with every step helps activate key leg muscles, making them work harder. The principle is that the pods are filled with air, which moves from one pod in the heel of the shoe to one in the forefoot as the heel hits the ground, increasing the size of the front pod. As you step forward and roll through the front of your foot, your leg muscles have to work harder than usual to overcome the increased volume of air.

For its part, ZigTech has a distinctive bottom unit that features what Reebok describes as “an innovative, lightweight foam that is engineered into a dramatic, geometric, zig-zag shape”, hence the name. The zig-zag sole absorbs the impact of heel strike and sends “a wave of energy along the length of the shoe” to help propel the wearer forward. This technology causes up to 20% less wear and tear on key leg muscles, especially the shins and hamstrings, the footwear brand claims.

In both cases, innovation in the outer sole gives these shoes their main selling points, but comfort, stability and foot health are key considerations for the design of the inner sole of the shoe, making the work ATP does worthy of this recent recognition on the part of Reebok’s parent company.

John McCallum, ATP technical sales manager, who accepted the award at the event in Vietnam, has explained that the accolade has made a big difference to his company.

Since becoming involved in the development work for the Reebok products, ATP has gone from having one foam system to four and, in May 2010, it was able to add to its production platform in Asia by opening a factory in Ho Chi Minh City to complement the one it was already running in Dongguan, China, expanding from four production lines to 17. Production has increased from 600,000 pairs a month to more than 2.5 million, and ATP has been able to branch into midsole technologies.

ATP has developed a patented process it calls ‘Release Free’ because mould-release, including silicon, is not required, making for dry rather than greasy components and, the company argues, a better look and feel than moulds made from aluminium, epoxy or steel. The process is based on 20 years’ experience and, the company says, allows for high levels of flexibility in a range of areas.

First, ATP says its master-tooling capabilities are

inexpensive, which make the production of the moulds themselves cost-effective. With moulds set up, the production system allows a variety of quantities of polyurethane foam to be inserted into the same moulding cavity, meaning ATP can produce a wide range of thickness in the same insole product. The pouring system is computerised and can deliver what the company calls “the precise chemical shot weights” in increments of a hundredth of a second. Similarly, different contours of the footbed surface using the same moulding cavity allow for the anatomical features, the support areas and the look of the product to change according to customer needs. Furthermore, ATP says the moulds can work with a wide range of lining materials without costly mould modifications.

An important part of the Release Free manufacturing process is the consideration it gives to tackling waste. “We’ve created an initiative we call 3-2-1,” Mr McCallum explains, “in an effort to educate and remind the footwear industry of the waste involved in manufacturing insoles using the thermoforming process, whereby for every two insoles made, the equivalent of another insole is wasted to landfill. Three are made, two are shipped and one is wasted.”



In the groove. Insoles from ATP.

CREDIT: ATP MANUFACTURING