



Huntsman's footwear technology centre in Belgium, where trials took place on the new soling materials Franco Leone has used.

CREDIT: HUNTSMAN

Huntsman develops soling material with Indian footwear maker

New Delhi-based footwear brand Franco Leone was searching for soling materials that would help its shoes endure the Indian climate and found the answer by working in partnership with chemicals manufacturer Huntsman. Franco Leone has a reputation for high-quality, formal men's shoes, which it sells online. To ensure that its footwear is suitable for Indian consumers, the shoes have to be lightweight, comfortable and able to withstand the hot and humid conditions that many regions of India experience in the course of the year. It has found that using a polyether-based polyurethane from Huntsman to create shoe soles has helped its latest menswear collection achieve this.

A move to bring production in house

In the past, the footwear firm may just have handed the problem of improving the performance of the soling in its

Polyurethane experts from Huntsman have announced details of an innovative project with India-based footwear manufacturer Franco Leone.

shoes to outsource manufacturing partners, but it took a decision some years ago to bring at least some of its production in-house. Franco Leone started working with Huntsman in 2012 and after several meetings, the two companies embarked on the creation of a bespoke soling solution based on Huntsman's polyether technology – a form of polyurethanes proven to perform well in hot humid climates, where other materials can fail. Using polyether-

based materials from the chemicals company's Daltoped range, the two partners developed a system that delivers a hardwearing outsole with a low-density cushioning mid-sole. The material can also be engineered to achieve eye-catching colour and finishing effects.

Following successful trials at Huntsman's footwear technology centres in India and Belgium, Franco Leone put the new material into production. So far, more than 100,000 Franco Leone shoes have been made using the Daltoped technology.

Vishal Bhambri, chief executive of Franco Leone, says of the development: "We are one of the fastest growing companies in the Indian footwear industry, manufacturing shoes that reflect international style trends and making them available to Indian consumers at a sensible price point. The decision to move aspects of our manufacturing in-house was a major step for our business and finding the right partner to support this shift was essential. Switching to a different soling material at the same time as changing our production set-up made sense and Huntsman helped us manage the transition, coming up with an innovative material, and providing expert, hands-on, technical support, on the ground in India."

Competitive edge

Huntsman introduced its Daltoped technology to the Indian market at the India International Leather Fair in Chennai in February this year. Its key message at the event was that "differentiated footwear technologies" can give footwear manufacturers and brands a real competitive edge.

The range includes Daltoped Lite, a system that uses polyether material as an "ultra-lightweight, cost-effective and

highly versatile alternative to ethyl vinyl acetate (EVA)" in soling, ideal for the production of soles for the kind of shoes Franco Leone wants to make and sell, the chemical company suggests, because soles made with this technology combine low density to help make shoes comfortable with high-level mechanical properties and ease-of-processing. Another product in the range is Daltoped Grip, which, as the name suggests, is especially for safety shoes.

Specialist knowledge

Neeraj Garg, Huntsman's commercial manager for footwear in the region, says that designing long-lasting shoe soles for the market there requires specialist knowledge. "You need a good grasp of the local market but also of the materials that will perform well in the climate that they'll be sold and ultimately worn in," he says. "For companies like Franco Leone, using a polyether solution like those available in our Daltoped range is a sensible option. We know from experience that polyether polyurethanes are extremely stable and offer good hydrolytic stability in tropical climates such as India. We are delighted to have worked on this project with the team at Franco Leone, who are helping to lead the way in fashionable footwear in India."

In general, the Indian footwear market is growing fast, Mr Garg says. He adds that it's "imperative" that manufacturers make the right material decisions. 

Footwear brand Franco Leone decided it needed special soling materials to make its shoes suitable for India's hot, humid climate.

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