



Saucony is fiercely proud of its running shoe heritage and of its history of product innovation.

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Saucony celebrates 120 years of making shoes

Specialist running shoe brand Saucony takes its name from the Saucony Creek, a body of water running through the borough of Kutztown in Pennsylvania. It was in this area that the company made its first shoe in 1898. The name is believed to have been bestowed on the creek by the Lenape indigenous people, based on a word in their language, 'saconk', meaning "where two rivers run together". The creek also inspired Saucony's logo, which represents an endless flow of water, with three distinct dots added to represent boulders on the riverbed.

Rich history

The Saucony Shoe Manufacturing Company built its first factory along the creek in 1906. At the same time, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, further to the north east of the US, cobbler Abraham Hyde, originally from Russia, had opened a shoe store manufacturing carpet slippers made from the remnants of rugs. The paths of the two companies would eventually cross.

As the century progressed Mr Hyde expanded his footwear

As it marks its 120th anniversary, Saucony has vowed to continue its efforts to demonstrate the "transformational power of running".

line, taking in baseball shoes, roller boots and bowling shoes during the 1940s. Its products even made it into space, being worn by NASA astronaut Walter Cunningham during Apollo 7, the first manned Apollo mission, in 1968.

The Saucony Shoe Manufacturing Company was also expanding and in 1968 it began making running shoes. The company was acquired by Hyde footwear, which relocated it to the city of Cambridge. Under its new owner, Saucony received its first major recognition in the shape of an award from a leading US consumer magazine, a moment it describes as the "launch pad" for its success in the running shoe market.

The 1980s saw Saucony ride the wave created by a boom in



the popularity of running. During this period, it set about designing products specifically with the runner in mind in an attempt to get the jump on its competitors. At the start of the 1990s, the company capitalised on the advancements in footwear technology, launching its GRID (ground reaction inertia device) cushioning system, around which it built its technical line of footwear.

At the dawn of the 21st century, Saucony focused its attention on reducing the weight of its products while still improving the cushioning they offered. It has said injection moulding technology played a crucial role here, allowing its product team to create a midsole that satisfied both these ambitions. It defines the current period of its history as the "Everun years", a reference to the Everun (EVR) cushioning technology it launched in 2016 and to its use of innovative new materials to upgrade its range of shoes.

"For 120 years, we have possessed an authentic history in the running space," the brand states, insisting "no other brand has this pure running history". It believes the progress it has made in terms of running shoe technology has kept it ahead of its competitors and at the "forefront of industry innovation".

Runners first

Saucony has also demonstrated its capacity for innovation away from product development. Its chief marketing officer, Amanda Reiss, describes the running community as the "driving heartbeat" of its business and it has invested in a number of campaigns to inspire more people to take up running.

This has included the launch of the Saucony Run for Good Foundation in 2006. This charitable off-shoot wants to fight childhood obesity by providing grants to non-profit organisations to support children's running programmes. Its 'Run Your World' campaign, unveiled in 2017, is targeted at

adult runners and aims to help more people discover the "transformational power of running". Of course, this would, in theory, give it access to a broader group of consumers, so the motivation is not entirely altruistic.

One of its more recent initiatives is the Freedom Track Club, a Boston-based elite running group aiming to develop future Olympians. The athletes in this programme are coached by Tim Broe, who competed for the US in the 5,000 metres at the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens. As well as the team of coaches he leads, the club is supported by a panel of experts, including a team physician, a strength coach, a nutritionist, a personal development coach and a physical therapist. The aspiring Olympians also have access to Saucony's in-house fitness centre and to a dedicated "athlete's village" at the brand's headquarters as they set their sights on a place at the 2020 Games in Tokyo.

"The mission of the Freedom Track Club aligns with that of the Saucony brand: to empower the human spirit through running," said Patrick O'Malley, president of Saucony at the time of the unveiling of the project in September 2017. "We know that running can be transformational and we're committed to helping each of these talented athletes 'run their world,' further maximising their true potential in order to compete with the best in the world."

Special year

"This year is a special one for us," Ms Reiss says of 2018, "a chance for the entire Saucony family to reflect on the achievements of the past 120 years, and to celebrate our relentless dedication to the sport of running." She adds the brand will continue its efforts to inspire runners of all abilities, both by manufacturing high-quality products and by helping them to access "an unforgettable and confident running experience".

Ms Reiss also insists Saucony will blend new product innovation, for example its Everun cushioning technology and its Isofit dynamic fit system, with nods to its heritage through its Originals collection. The centrepiece of this range is the Jazz shoe, which at the time of its release in 1992, according to Saucony, was the most technical performance running shoe on the market.

It is organising a series of events throughout 2018 to mark its 120th anniversary. The first of these took place in March with the launch of the Shadow 5000 EVR shoe. It is based on the Original Shadow 5000 model released in 1989, but Saucony says it has been remodelled "from the ground up" to make it more lightweight, breathable and comfortable. The updated version features a full-length Everun midsole, designed to offer more energy return; a breathable knit upper that balances stretch and fit; and "premium leather accents" in the form of a leather heel counter and tongue badging. The brand made a limited number of pairs available on its website and through selected retail partners. They came in three colourways: red/green, black/teal and triple white.

'Meaningful connections'

In May, Saucony named Anne Cavassa as its new president. She replaced Patrick O'Malley, who had taken charge at the start of 2016. Prior to assuming this role, she was chief customer experience officer and vice president of marketing and apparel at Brooks Running. She has also held leadership positions at Timberland, Nike, Ibex and Reebok International.

"Anne is a true visionary who drives brand growth through relentless consumer focus, compelling storytelling, and a

commitment to marketing and product innovation," said Richie Woodforth, president of the Wolverine Boston Group, the division of parent company Wolverine Worldwide to which Saucony has belonged since a restructure in 2016. "Anne's established connection to the running community will be critical as we continue to transform the brand for the future."

Wolverine does not give a detailed breakdown of the financial performance of its individual brands but in a conference call to discuss the group's revenue for 2017, president and CEO, Blake Krueger, said Saucony's underlying revenue for the year was down mid-single digits. "Saucony certainly had some late product and a couple of quality issues that had an impact on Q4, which was a little worse than the performance for the rest of the year," he explained at the time.

This was underlined in the first quarter of 2018 with a further mid-single digit fall in revenue. Despite this, Mr Krueger said "results were on plan", although he expects it to take a few more quarters before the brand returns to growth. He added that "accelerated introductions" towards the end of 2018 should lead to low-single digit growth for the whole of 2018.

Upon assuming her new position, Ms Cavassa summed up her vision for Saucony: "Running is about the journey and the meaningful connections we make along the way. I'm so excited to join Saucony as it celebrates its 120th anniversary. With an award-winning product portfolio, a commitment to the consumer experience and an extremely passionate and talented team of people, Saucony is well-positioned to grow its global footprint while celebrating those unique and meaningful connections among runners everywhere." 



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