

Small feet—big decisions

David Lyon

Small children's footwear should fulfil three main functions: aesthetic appeal, protection and support while standing or moving, and fitting without restriction allied to room for growth. It also falls into three age groups and size ranges (English and Continental).

Toddlers	1–3 years	1–6 / 16–23
Infants	3–5 years	7–10 / 24–27
Boys & Girls	5–7 years	1–6 / 16–23

Toddlers

Children usually commence walking at 12–18 months. One viewpoint says footwear is not needed before then or before a child leaves the safety of the home and starts walking in outside conditions. The alternative says that correctly fitted shoes provide assistance and confidence at the 'first walker' stage. By the age of two years, walking has become natural and so comfort and support become most important.

First shoes for toddlers must support the ankle. Toplines should be positioned below the ankle bone and, while boot styles may cover it, they must be flexible and yielding. A 'bagged top' construction greatly improves comfort.

Pre-walking footwear does not need soles or heels as such and may be made by a 'stitched sock' construction. The bottom edge of the upper is stitched to a sock that also serves as a flexible insole and sole. It is normally done inside out and the shoe turned so the seam is hidden on the inside. Alternatively, the seam may be left exposed as a decorative feature. Accurate pattern cutting and stitching is needed for this type of footwear and the technique is similar to the Californian or Slip-Lasted method (*Figure 1*).

The moccasin construction can also be used to produce a soft and flexible shoe but care must be taken to ensure the panel seam joining the two sections is soft and pliable (*Figure 2*). At this age the child's foot is unformed and consists of cartilage that can easily be distorted or even permanently damaged by badly designed footwear.

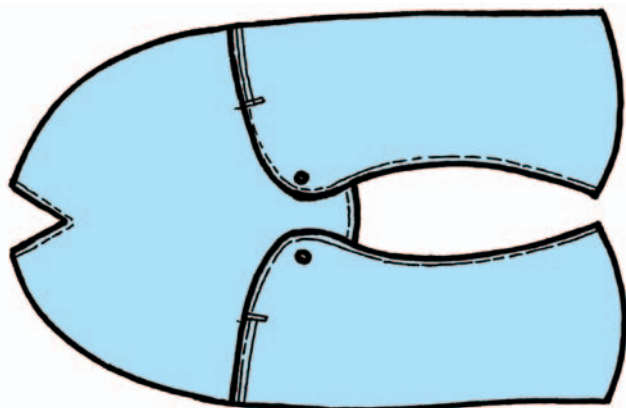


Figure 1: A small v-cut and seam at the toe assists toe shape.

Figure 2: Small moccasins must have soft and pliable seams.



Easy foot entry and adjustment is a further essential and is in the hands of the parent or minder. It is for this reason that the styling of toddler's footwear focuses on patterns that have these attributes. Tie shoes with open facings are always popular and the Derby/Gibson pattern is easier to fit on the foot than an Oxford. The former has facings that open along their full length, whilst the Oxford is restricted and has no adjustment at the bottom of the facings (*Figures 3 & 4*).

Figure 3: Open facings assist foot entry and adjustment.

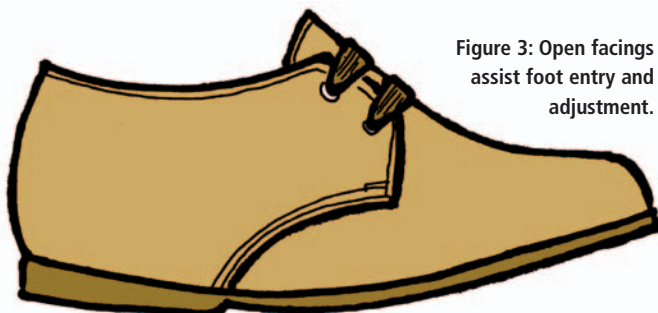


Figure 4: The Oxford is less suitable for small feet.

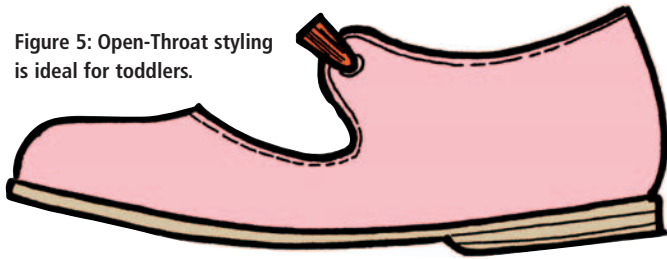


The Open-Throat tie shoe is another excellent pattern for toddlers. Because it carries a flat heel or no heel at all, it can be cut as a one-piece upper with no seams to harm the small foot (*Figure 5*). On all tie-styles, alternatives to traditional eyelets are metallic or leather loops, which make foot entry and exit much easier when dealing with a non-compliant foot.

Strap and Bar designs are also popular. Traditional buckles and buttons have largely been replaced by 'hook and loop' systems. These are easier to adjust to any size or shape of foot and will be discussed in more detail later on.

Most toddlers' footwear is made without lasts or moulds, as a clearly defined shape is not necessary. They are, however, needed to establish an accurate base pattern from which sectional patterns can be produced. It is essential that footwear

Figure 5: Open-Throat styling is ideal for toddlers.



for this age and size group is soft, pliable and designed to allow foot growth without restriction.

Upper designs may mimic senior fashions, particularly for girls. Mothers exert a strong influence on their daughters' clothes and footwear, imposing their own likes and dislikes. Many senior trends translate well as long as the essential objectives of fit and comfort are not forgotten.

Infants

The wearer is now at the 'rough and tumble' stage requiring increasing emphasis on the functional aspect of footwear. The foot is also growing rapidly so there must be no restriction or pressure on the bones as they are still very pliable and can be permanently damaged.

Most footwear in this size range is made on lasts or moulds, the design of which is most important. The foot must be allowed to spread, especially at the toe and instep. Soles must now protect the foot and resist the hard wear they will receive. Raised heels and extreme fashion elements in last design should be avoided and toes should either be 'nature form' or have plenty of width and depth. Narrowing them on girls' lasts is not good and a natural toe shape can still look attractive when teamed with the right upper design.

The width/girth measurement is important. Whilst men's and women's shoes are usually made on single average fitting lasts, a greater range is required for children. Two width fittings are often used with a standard increase in girth measurement. While this will offer a better fit to a greater number of feet, it does increase tooling costs. An alternative that is sometimes used involves the addition of 'increases' or 'shovers' across the instep and cone of the last. While they provide the necessary increase in girth, they do not increase width across the tread and are essentially a cost-saving compromise (Figure 6).

Small girls and boys

Footwear for boys or girls aged 5 to 7 years often requires different styling and this will be reflected in the last. Female versions will be softer and more slender at the toe but must not compromise either fit or foot health so plenty of space must remain. All lasts must now have a clearly defined inside waist to support the arch of the foot as it strengthens and develops. The

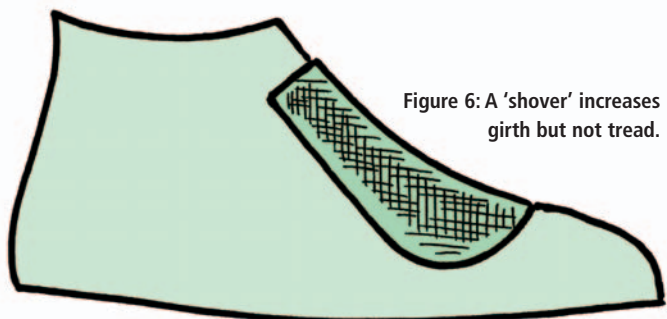


Figure 6: A 'shover' increases girth but not tread.

instep and cone areas must be designed so that the shoe provides firm support during all activities.

Leisure and sporty styles can be unisex and senior styling is easily transferred to provide fashion, fit and comfort in equal measure. The basic trainer with its open and low cut facings, providing easy foot entry and adjustment, is ideal for this age range (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Simple trainer styling is ideal.

Upper material is critical and while synthetics and fabrics may be popular for mums and dads, they are not suitable for small feet, as they encourage the build-up of water vapour and can lead to conditions such as athlete's foot. Leather remains the best material and, once again, should be soft and flexible to avoid harming fragile feet. Some scuff resistant material may, however, be needed at points likely to suffer from the boisterous activities of this age group.

Toes are particularly vulnerable to scuffing and the upturned toe look so popular with adults is a way to reduce it. Lasts are designed with an upward swing on the underside of the toe and the sole continues along this line to help protect the upper from damage (Figure 8).

Strap and lace-up designs are both good for this age group. With the former, the holding strap should be at ninety degrees across the centre of the instep. This provides the best fit as it is the shortest distance between two points. Any curving or angling of the strap will lessen its effectiveness (Figure 9).

Alternative systems such as slider trims or 'press and release' variants have largely replaced the traditional buckle and ➤



Figure 8: Upturned toes are good but need careful design.

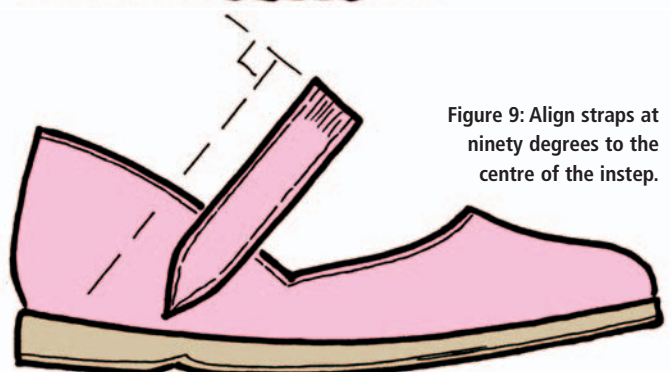
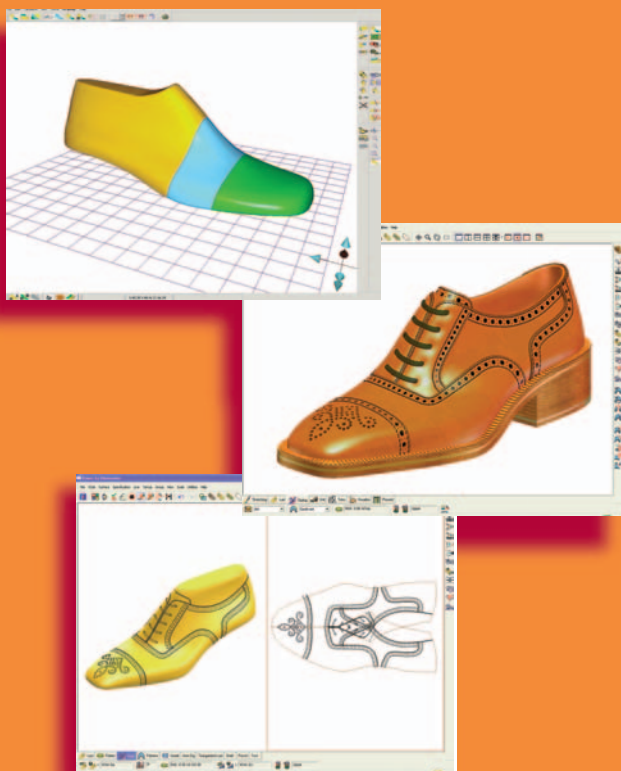


Figure 9: Align straps at ninety degrees to the centre of the instep.

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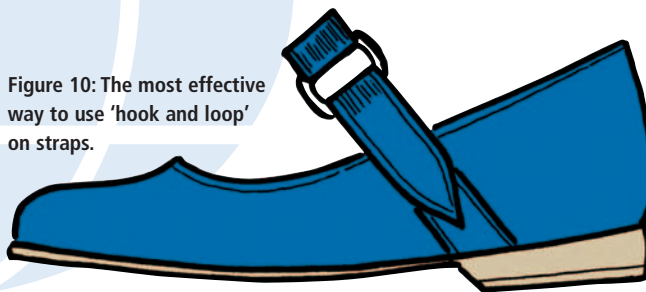
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Figure 10: The most effective way to use 'hook and loop' on straps.



provide easier and more accurate adjustment and fit. 'Hook and loop' is also most effective, as it offers an exact fit on the foot and also enables the person making the adjustment to feel the degree of tightness required. When used with straps, the best technique is to pull the strap back on itself through a ring, as this allows gentle leverage and accurate positioning (Figure 10).

Patterns are important here as all too often shoes of every quality can be seen with the hooked section clearly visible in wear. This is because the strap is too short to fit the necessary range of foot sizes and widths (Figure 11).

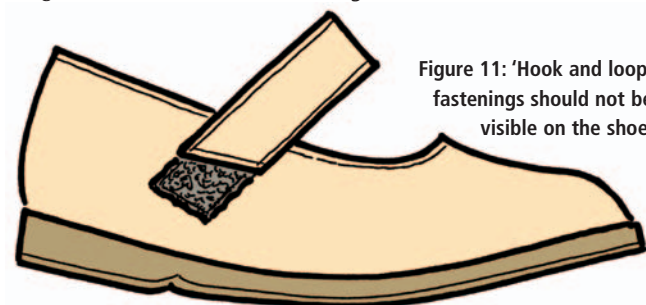
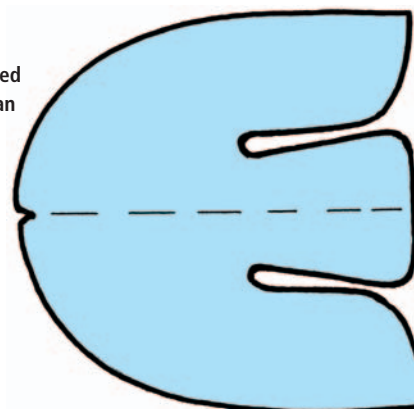


Figure 11: 'Hook and loop' fastenings should not be visible on the shoe.

Figure 12: A combined vamp and tongue can also save money.



Lace-up styles in the three basic forms already described are again the most popular choice in this size range. And, once again, more modern fastenings such as D-rings and ski-hooks taken from adult ranges can prove ideal.

The Derby/Gibson is perhaps the most widely worn of all junior styles. However, it is advisable to increase the width between the two facing stays in order to ease foot entry and provide additional allowance for rapid growth. It is also a good idea to cut the vamp and tongue in one as this removes a seam that can rub across the sensitive instep (Figure 12).

There are many other types of shoe that translate well into children's and fast moving adult fashions should always be considered for down sizing. However, fashion must always be subordinate to function and fit. Too many children's feet have been damaged in the past and will continue to be damaged in the future through insufficient thought and care given to their needs. They may be small feet but they demand big decisions to be taken on their behalf. 🌐