

Our Reporter visits Performance Days in Munich in April 2015 and reflects on the saga of the future of DWRs



In the old days an exhibition was all about sales on a personal level. Rather than stands being about demonstrating how big the marketing budget was, it was about having the chance to catch up face to face. Harrogate's COLA offered the retailer the chance to see rival ranges straight after one another, thus making the process of comparing easier. As brands became more powerful they employed reps on the road so that the visit could take place with the least hassle to the shop owner (and now they have showrooms around the country to help set the company culture in addition), as well as conversations being about what bulk advance order discount was available and how the range was going to be promoted by support marketing & advertising. As manufacturing went off-shore two decades ago, this led to the dominance of the economies-of-scale large orders, so much so that if any brand gets supply issues, all their rivals have enough excess stock to take over the vacant shelf space. One of the big losers in the process was the quality of design of the garment.

Performance Days is aimed squarely at the designers - those that can differentiate the product. In a refreshing style it has gone back to creating an exhibition that is focused on putting designers together with suppliers. Every exhibitor gets a shell scheme that can be decorated, but the focus is the tables where proper discussions can happen. I did not see one big video screen, but instead I was able to touch a vast array of fabrics, trims, & accessories. With it being a two day exhibition, there was one evening to join the two days of business: the coffee bar area was transformed by just adding free beer - something that reminded British visitors of "The George effect" at COLA.

Alongside the stands there were two features that enabled the visitor to have a better comprehension of the future

direction of the industry: a presentation theatre and a fabric showcase. Both areas enabled either a casual participation of either listening in to influencers, or the chance to feel the fabric samples, without being overseen by salespeople. There was

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also a display wall where developments could be seen: the Spring/Summer theme prompted several areas of newer trims and accessories. Two products had been judged the best in the show's two prize categories of the Performance Award (gripper technology) and (new at this show) the Eco Performance Award (wool as a mid-layer & drydye technology)

Almost every fabric brand had a booth apart from WL Gore and Polartec. Designers happily circulated between pre-booked appointments.



The biggest conversation theme picked up was the developments with Durable Water Resistant finishes. As prompted by the change of Norwegian legislation, which has come into force this year (but textiles have until 2017 to comply), fluorine chemistry is now outlawed. This is the main carrier in a carbon-chain DWR (better known as C8 or C6). The C8 version is now not being used, with the vast majority having moved to C6; the swap over has been simple for the manufacturers and chemical suppliers to do; the performance qualities are comparable

(though not as durable). Alternatives are able to repel water well, but are not so good on durability or oil resistance. Some finishes are more durable (Amaterrace has 80% performance after 30 washes - better than a C6 finish), but none are any good at stopping the sweat compromise of the DWR. Hydrocarbons offer a solution, but add an extra set of problems in that they are known to restrict breathability. The only positive with regards to oil repellancy is that people do wash their garments on a more regular basis these days, so there is not such a build-up of oil deposits as when membranes were popularly distributed 25 years ago.



Around this subject three of the key presentations came from major influencers in this area. Pamela Ravasio's centred on the future influences for consumers and legislation with case studies including Hiut Denim and wool; her EOG Sustainability team have been working hard in the DWR arena, but the chemists have not come up with a replacement chemical system (and are unlikely to). A presentation from Swerea's Stefan Posner covering the work of the Supfes.eu project (the Swedish testing agency that has been commissioned by the EOG, amongst others) reported that the European Chemicals Agency wants to adopt the ruling from Norway, possibly by 2018. He also revealed that all the DWR samples tested by their laboratory - even the Greenpeace fluorine-free garment - contained a "toxic soup of chemicals of C8 and above, even though no sample had been finished with anything more than C6. Greenpeace's Manfred Santen presented on how they acknowledge that there is such a high level of toxic residue already in the general environment that the campaign to reach Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals will never be obtained, but change is needed as soon as possible to prevent a worse status quo.

The next Performance Days, staged at the Munich Textile Centre (part of the World of Fashion) in Munich, will be in the first week of November - be there if you want to know what is at the cutting edge for A/W 17/18, www.performancedays.eu.

April's show had 127 exhibitors from 21 countries; 1000 visitors attended from 30 countries - it keeps growing bigger...