

Outdoor

INDUSTRY COMPASS

DATA & ANALYSIS

Review: Performance Days / Functional Fabric Fair Fabric Forum Jury

By Charles Ross | 25 October 2021



...or in other words: what will be seen in a year's time! Quite a mouthful, but having seen over 1,000 samples of curated fabric swatches over the second half of a week – the Outdoor & Sports industry should be proud that lockdown did not stop the development of fabric. As a trade that champions the technical improvements of materials, the competition for progress is highly regarded. Of course, the amount of marketing that accompanies the various swatches has increased too, so the need to have an entry point that strips the waffle away from the actual is important.

Although **ISPO** has always had part of the show for the ingredient fabric suppliers, the attention has moved away from the big show to the specialist: **Performance Days** has been the go-to event for over a decade now (and is even staged at ISPO's venue, **Messe München**), but at a more suitable time of the year to work with the schedule of the brand design teams. Anyone who has pulled a brand stand together knows that it is always touch-and-go whether the latest set of apparel samples will arrive in time for ISPO; hence, that department's members have lost their focus on their own forward planning come the end of January.



In North America, there have been regional Ingredient events that work around the **Outdoor Retailer** schedule; however, in 2018, the **Functional Fabric Fair** started (one show in New York for the athleisure brands, one in Portland for the outdoor sports). Although they have always complimented each other during lockdown, a closer bond was created. The shows are essentially a presentation area and a fabric forum surrounded by stands of the fabric converters. The attraction of the schedule means that appointments will be built in the quiet times around the presentations, but for most, the long look around the Performance Forum tells them which other appointments they need to make. There is a theme to each show – this autumn, it is *The Future of Nylon*: one of the core materials of the industry but, superficially, boring.

With shows going online during the pandemic, the presentation arena gained a worldwide audience, with some viewing figures exceeding three figures. Now that the physical shows are back, the attention has changed back to the materials. Technical stories will always attract, but if the tactile feel and drape do not match, the swatch will end up on the discarded pile. One of the best agencies in the ingredient market is the **Weichert** team, based in Ismaning near Munich. **Christian** initiated the specialized show in an upstairs room of the **World of Fashion** college that gradually expanded to encompass the whole floor and then the floor above. Simple parameters: everyone to have shell scheme stands, plus there was a bar to pass to be allowed to exhibit. The evening between the show days saw everyone gather, and multiple crates of beer were opened as relationships are caught up with.



Marco Weichert in discussion

Marco Weichert applies the same screening to entries to be featured in the Fabric Forum – an area where the top 10 to 30 fabric swatches are laid out alongside each other in categories (like 3-Layer, Lightweight & Downproof, or Midlayer). Only fabrics that have made sustainable progress are considered (any with C6 or silver ion finishes were rejected). The sample would remain unchosen if there were no reason for using virgin fabrics over recycled feedstock. This year saw four different teams go through every submitted sample so that champions could be celebrated; then, the teams came together and explained why their choices had been made so that the jury was unanimous in their victor.

Whereas I will not reveal who won the Innovation or Eco award categories, my notebook reveals the new trends. Nylon is now being replaced with bio-nylon (from an arable extract); this expands the polyamide choice much wider than just Nylon 6 or 66 to now include 6.10, 6.9, 10.10, or even 12. In the first decade of the millennium, the scandal of PET bottles going straight from the plant to the recyclers (without liquids ever being stored in them) meant that the recycled nylon process had been put under the microscope. Fortunately, the collection of used fishing nets, plus the advance in processing old tires and carpets, has meant that the feed-stock source is good. Those with just a “biodegradable” tag were not acknowledged unless the timescales and test methods were detailed. The product of the future is to have carbon balance (especially in-setted).

The biggest disappointment was the lack of fabrics from regenerative agriculture sources, but specific brands have invested in this carbon-negative sourcing chain to allow a competitive edge. **Patagonia, Timberland, Finisterre** and **The North Face** know that what they have enabled will soon be more widely available as farmers build up their supply capability. ReGenAg materials sequester more carbon in their growing process than the fabric processing and makeup uses.

What I liked the most was that at the session where the awards were allocated – the hand feel was still as important as the technical specification. In the same month when the new generation of Gore-Tex using an ePE membrane was introduced, true innovation also has a big role in delivering comfort and performance to the user.



The crowd at the Presentation Arena