

Fast track: what China can learn from the Lycra story

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Abstracts

Few brands have had as much impact on performance apparel as Lycra which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2009.

Initially, Lycra made its mark by providing new levels of comfort and freedom of movement in hosiery, legwear, intimate apparel and swimwear.

But more recently its qualities have been successfully exploited in casual wear and outerwear, and the fibre is now very prominent in the performance sportswear field.

Lycra was invented by a DuPont scientist, Joseph C Shivers, as long ago as 1959. It took the inventor a decade of development work to come up with the formulation which goes under the generic name of spandex or elastane.

In general, elastane, a polyurethane-polyurea copolymer, has better stretch than natural rubber. Indeed, it can be extended by up to 600% and recover to its original size which means that only a small percentage of it (normally 5%-30%) is needed in a blend to provide good stretch properties.

Also, elastane has better resistance to dry heat and oil, and, unlike rubber, it does not need to be covered or coated.

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