



Going the extra mile for the famous crocodile

Lacoste pique knitwear is benefiting from a new Monforts DynAir system at Devanlay's French plant

A new Monforts DynAir relaxation dryer is resulting in new-found flexibility for Devanlay at its key manufacturing plant in Troyes, 180km south east of Paris in France. It is also allowing the company to achieve the critical shrinkage values specified for its upmarket knitwear. The DynAir drying line is optimised for the relaxation shrinking of knitted fabrics in either open-width or tubular form and its special air guidance system has dynamic pulsating air currents, which allow the fabric to simply glide through the dryer completely skew-free.

Lacoste's L1212 jersey petit pique knit polo shirts revolutionised sportswear back in the 1930s and also set the ball rolling for the conspicuous branding to be found on clothing today – the crocodile motif being the very first to appear on the outside of a garment. Since the year 2000, Devanlay has been solely responsible for the design, manufacture and distribution of Lacoste branded clothing, with a worldwide license that extends until the year 2025.

Other companies have similar licenses for the Lacoste brand, such as Procter & Gamble for perfume, Samsonite for leather goods and Pentland for footwear, and in total in 2007, some 58 million articles bearing the crocodile were sold – the equivalent of two items every second and achieving wholesale sales of Euros 1.557 billion. Clothing, however, remains the largest area, representing over 58% of the sales.

There are now also over 1,000 dedicated Lacoste shops around the globe, with items marketed in a further 2,000 corners. And the number keeps growing. In 2000 Devanlay gave up other interests in order to focus solely on supplying Lacoste products from locations in France, Peru, Tunisia, Morocco, Romania and China. Some 19 million separate items pass through the Devanlay plants each year.

The knitting plant in Troyes is equipped with 51 circular knitting machines and 76 flat knitting units with an output of more than 12 tonnes of fabric a day. With Lacoste introducing items in more than 50 different colours each season – from standard shades to bold and vivid new options – the dyeing and finishing department at Troyes is critical to operations. Monforts previously supplied the plant with a Montex stenter

and a Toptex compressive shrinking system and this year delivered the DynAir three-chamber relaxation dryer in a width of 2.4metre.

This has replaced an older and less flexible dryer and has been in operation without problems for half-a-year, says Devanlay knitting and dyehouse manager Jean-Christophe Tripier. "We made a lot of tests at the Monforts research and development centre in Mönchengladbach to be sure we could achieve what we were after in terms of shrinkability and drying efficiency, in addition to making gains in respect of gas and electricity consumption," he said. The DynAir system is also suitable for all of the fabrics we produce here, which provides us with more options in production scheduling."

Tubular knits are processed in widths of 60-100mm and open width fabrics in widths of 160-220mm at Troyes, with fabric weights in the range of 80-350 gsm. All products are 100% cotton or cotton with Lycra. Another advantage of the new 2-4-metre-wide DynAir dryer is that Devanlay can now run two batches of its tubular fabric together through the machine, resulting in considerable savings.

"The flexibility of this unit is a big plus for us compared to the old dryer and we are now achieving the same level of quality across all of our lines," Tripier said. "The control of shrinkage is also most important to us, and we have been achieving shrinkage values of 3-4% in length and 2-3% in width on pique knits working at 95 degrees Centigrade. We have been quite surprised at the consistency of these results."

The DynAir is also being used in a resin coating process employed at Troyes to provide the fabrics with improved shrinkage, pilling and wash-fastness properties. Tripier said that production at the Troyes plant has increased by 30% for the past four years.

"Obviously, only having one customer is a big advantage in terms of knowing well in advance our production schedules," he said. "It also means we can be more exacting in our quality standards and in our expectations of the technology we require to achieve them." ●