Stanbee's factory in Thailand is due to add an additional 6,100 square metres of production space.
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A mission of sustainability

Stanbee, a global manufacturer of box toes and heel counters was founded by Manny Berkson and his son Stan in Roseland, New Jersey in 1948. They were joined later by Manny's other son Howard who took over the running of the company. Today, it is led by Howard's son, Michael Berkson, with operations in Thailand and Vietnam, as well as their headquarters in the United States. "My family opened Stanbee with the goal of building an industry leader," Berkson says, "and the company wound up being just that. And now, we're moving even further ahead with our sustainability initiatives."

The company has proved its ongoing commitment to innovation by releasing its most sustainable, high-performing component material yet. Called Nitro Force*, the company says it is a breakthrough product that is made from a minimum of 85% recycled plastic (PET) bottles and is fully recyclable. Berkson goes on to say, "With Nitro Force, we are offering our customers the industry's most sustainable product while fulfilling two prongs of its ecological mission by reducing its use of virgin raw materials and increasing its reuse of an underutilised global waste stream. Our Nitro products are our most sustainable ones yet. They literally serve as a conduit for the global waste stream. I have no doubt my grandfather and father would be proud if they were here to see the Stanbee vision come to life."

Sustainability is in the DNA

The company's director of sales, Leo Provencher, agrees. "Sustainability is in our DNA. We've never taken our eye off it and are always looking for new ways to innovate and reduce our impact on the environment." When speaking of sustainability, Berkson is particularly proud of the company's zero-waste net-part programme. "With Nitro Force, we employ a true closed-loop process. If you send us a DXF file, we'll cut your parts for you and then recycle the waste to make even more Nitro Force products. It's a most effective way to reduce the global waste stream."

The company is already well known for its environmentally friendly Verge, Vantage and SporToe products. The success of these components was the inspiration behind the new product line, which brings each of these products to a higher level of sustainability and performance. Nitro Force is in fact a lighter version of Verge, which has proved popular ever since it was introduced in 2010, so it is a case of building on earlier success. As mentioned, it is said to be fully recyclable in the same way as Verge while also increasing the use of recyclable materials from 50% to nearly 85%. The company will also shortly be announcing three additional products, Nitro Flex an upgrade of the Vantage range, Nitro Sport an upgrade for SporToe and Nitro Vulc an all-new range for vulcanised footwear.

New school thinking

Independent studies would appear to support the company's claim that Nitro Force outperforms other components in virtually all functionality tests. It was found to be extremely light, very strong and highly durable with optimal testing values. In addition, it had excellent shape retention and resilience. Stanbee says that the main reason why it scores so well despite its extremely light weight, is the addition of nitrogen gas during the manufacturing process. This innovative technology causes bubbles to form throughout the core material which, in turn, make counters and box toes cut from it lighter than their predecessors without sacrificing stiffness, strength or durability. Furthermore, by displacing some of the core matter, the process reduces the amount of raw material used. "This is new-school thinking," says Provencher. "we're constantly upgrading products with new approaches and new techniques."

Asian expansion

Initial feedback from customers suggests that the demand for these patent-pending products will be at an all-time high. This is one reason why the company is expanding its facilities in Asia. In Thailand, it is adding 2,200 square meters to its state-of-the-art plant, giving it more than 6,100 square meters of manufacturing, warehousing and administrative space. This location already serves as a major production hub for the company and has three extruding lines and full cutting and shipping capabilities. Furthermore, it is located within the Amata Nakorn Free Zone, allowing it to import machinery and materials duty-free.

In Vietnam, the company is adding another 6,000 square meters of space plus the first of three planned extrusion lines to its manufacturing facility just east of Ho Chi Minh City. As a result, it will now have its own supply chain in its Vietnam factory, extruding sheets in the same place it has been cutting net parts. Today, Stanbee is able to produce more than 33 million pairs of components per month. When the expansions are complete, it estimates that number will jump to 43 million pairs. "Our manufacturing capabilities in Asia are being expanded and streamlined at the same time," says Provencher. "Our entire work-chain is being rebuilt. Now, in Vietnam, we'll be able to extrude product right where we cut net parts. And we'll continue delivering the components to your factory door. We're eliminating a range of logistical issues and cutting lead-times significantly."

Asked about the future, he sees one of continued innovation. "We will do what we've always done. We'll expand our capabilities as our customers' needs dictate. We're committed to bringing our customers sustainable, high-performing products in the most convenient, cost-effective way possible." Michael Berkson agrees. As he puts it, innovation and sustainability are at the core of Stanbee's ongoing philosophy. "The unwritten code is to innovate in ways never thought possible," he says. "That's what tests us. That's what drives us. If you told my grandfather, nearly 75 years ago, that his company would be a global leader in innovation, he'd be proud. That was his vision from day one."

Nitro Force Product Characteristics

Thickness:	Nitro Force 0.8mm – 0.76mm to 0.84mm. Nitro Force 1.0mm – 0.95mm to 1.05mm.
Cutting:	Multi-directional for optimum yield.
Activation:	80°C to 90°C.
Cold Moulding:	0°C to -5°C with sufficient dwell time to secure minimum bond-line temperature of 30°C or less.
Sheet size:	101.6cm x 152.4cm (40in x 60in).
Area:	1.548 M^2 (1.852 sq yd).
Packing:	500 sheets per pallet.

Recommended shelf life two years from date of manufacture.

**Nitro Force® is a registered trademark.*

Nitro Force materials can be cut in any direction for maximum yield.