



photo: Giro

SNOW HELMETS & PROTECTION FW16/17

TREND REPORT

Wintertime on the slopes has become a lot more dangerous; especially since carving skis were invented and allow people to fly downhill with more speed they can handle. More and more folks heading out to the backcountry where deadly rocks hide under a pristine blanket of white gold doesn't help safety either, of course. But that is neither secret nor surprise – for customers seeking and brands offering products alike. Hence the choice on the shelves is greater than ever and

Anna Langer has sieved out the finer details.

HELMET TRENDS

"It might sound obvious, but safety is definitely a trend that is more and more important in the helmet industry," Mattia Berardi, Product Manager at Giro explains that consumer habits and expectations have changed: "They want to know how they are being protected, in which particular situation, and against what types of impacts." Smith's Helmet Category Manager Graham Sours agrees, seeing "an increased awareness of helmet technologies by the consumer" and Ståle N. Møller, Director of Design and Development at Sweet Protection adds that customers also want "better protection and general performance from their products."

TECHNOLOGY & MATERIALS

This also includes the fit of the helmet, as its protective qualities are highly dependent on that. Bern, Burton and Smith have implemented a Boa Fit System for this, "the biggest upgrade to our line this year, it carries over all models" as Bern's Brand Manager Josh Walker announces.

Improving both fit and protection is the MIPS Multi-Directional Impact Protection System that Anon, Giro, Smith and Sweet Protection collaborate with. "It allows the whole shell to adapt to the head-size," as Giro's Mattia explains, and also "helps reduce rotational impacts"

according to Smith's Graham. Sweet Protection offer the MIPS "either as standard or optional on all helmets."

Materials are also crucial for the safety of the wearer and "the use and layering of alternative helmet materials is gaining momentum" advises Anon Category Manager for Helmets, Andy, who proudly announces their new Endure helmet "which combines Anon's Flex-Shell construction with G-Form's innovative Reactive Protection Technology (RPT®) and HDPE foam for unmatched repeatable impact performance." Sweet work with an "advanced carbon composite technology, either as a full shell or laminated with thermoplastics" for several of their models.

TSG combine "durable ABS with shock-absorbing EPS foam for super strong protection" as well as a "thin layer of Polycarbonate over the reinforced EPS" on their in-mould helmets, "for a very lightweight protective helmet" as Head of Communication Nadja Herger explains. Nutcase work with "durable ABS hard shells and EPS liners" as well, Giro features EPS, EPP and Vinyl Nitrile in all liners, as well as PC and different types of ABS plastic for the outer shell, and Smith combine EPS and Koroyd®: "A revolutionary new material that absorbs 30% more energy upon impact when compared to international standards, while increasing airflow."

On the liner inside they use “a Nanosilver performance material that wicks away moisture and eliminates smell from repetitive use,” while POC add “a brand new liner concept based on unique materials and combinations that we have in our toolbox already, but we are tweaking it to fit a different kind of impact situation,” E-Commerce & Digital Marketing Manager Stine Schjøtt-Quist tells us.

Picture Organic Clothing patented their “COMPOSITE FUSION™ PLUS in-moulding technology with dual density foam and crumple zone technology” that provides a “perfect shell/liner connection” and



photo: Picture

reduce the weight of their helmets with “recycled Polystyrene from car boards from the Japanese car industry”, says founder Julien Durant. Bern addresses the weight issue with a ‘zipmold’ construction, “which is essential PU foam” that allows for tapered, super-thin constructions, as their new Junior Zipmold Helmet shows.

FEATURES

Max Thurner, International Marketing Manager for Snowboard & Protection at Head points out that since “helmets have become a regular player in the standard winter sport equipment”, most riders already have one and are “now about to buy their second (third, etc.). This means, next to the basic function of protecting your head, fashion and features become more relevant for consumers.” As does comfort, which they cater for with their new, super lightweight In-Mold V-Series “with urban aesthetics” and venturi-ventilation for a comfortable helmet climate.” Smith are proud of their AEROCORE construction, which gives improved “fit, ventilation and exceptional protection”.

The integration of sound is a popular feature for many brands and consumers alike and Outdoor Tech™ has become somewhat of an

“industry standard” according to Bern’s Josh, who designs all their models to “interact with their wireless chips and wired chips.” Giro and Smith work with them as well, since “music adds to the thrill of your mountain experience, or maybe making the first powder day of the year means taking a work call on the lift,” as Smith’s Graham explains. K2 offer “integrated loudspeakers or pockets prepared for Bluetooth loudspeakers” states Nikolaus Dietrich, Sales Manager and Anon also have “earpads that are audio compatible” on all adult models. Sweet Protection work with Koss to “provide a very good sound, as well as compatibility with iPhones.”

Compatibility with goggles has already become a standard for all brands. Naturally for those who do both, like Smith focus on “Ultimate Integration,” and soon Bern, who are releasing their first goggle line. But even then, choice is king. “We want to have our goggles fitting perfectly with our helmets” says Mattia from Giro, “but we also want our consumers to be free to choose whatever helmet or goggle brands they want. So we test our products with competitors to make sure that they fit with most of the products that can be found on the market.” Sweet share this sentiments, confirms Ståle: “We make sure to keep track of what leading goggle suppliers are doing to make sure you’ll have a perfect fit. All our helmets have quite a deep and stable front opening making sure that oversized goggles will fit perfectly without gaps and nose press.” Goggle straps in the back (or side goggle clips as K2 do them) help as well.

Other additional features include the “stealth and user friendly break away POV camera mount” from Giro, that you can snap in and out of a slot attached to the hard shell – even with your gloves on, or the Nutcase Fidlock buckle, “a unique solution that enables one-handed operation even with gloves on, and prevents skin pinching” as Philip Mascher, Head of Marketing says.

PRINTS, PATTERNS, COLOURS

K2 agree with Max’s sentiment from above, that protection is becoming more of a “fashion article” and uses “modern, fresh colours” next year. Nutcase add “expressive graphics” such as graffiti, comics, animal and floral prints to their street line, as well as new colourways for 16/17, as do most other brands. Smith have teamed up with Woolrich and “dug by hand through the archives of wool to come up with this year’s patterns: a traditional blanket pattern harkening back to pioneer trappers and a geometric pattern out of the deadstock archive.”

And along those same lines, AJ Avrin from Shred Optics says their helmets are seeing “darker and more neutral colours throughout the line to offer the perfect accessory for styling. We have also worked very hard on our Shred Femme line, which is our first female specific offering that spans the collection and all categories.”

Bern on the other hand “move away from the bright skittle colourways” to more muted, tonal and “understated” ones. Max from Head also thinks that “the product needs to with the rest of their gear colour-wise, plus suit their riding style in terms of look and features.” Picture Organic match their helmets with their outerwear, combing black and white or matt tones with fluro colours. Sweet add “multiple layer of top coats offering depth and interest to matt colours” and TSG also favour “a matt satin surface” next year, on its own or in combination with tone-in-tone prints or gloss on matt.

Catering especially for the female shredders, Giro introduce “women’s graphics, with women’s specific designed ear pads which include features like satin on the fit system to prevent the hair getting caught, and a more comfortable liner”, but all in all, “skate lineage and skate-style helmets still rule the snowboard world, as it should be” sums up Josh from Bern.

BODY PROTECTION

“As the need for impact protection penetrates the most core riders as well as the casual riders, we offer options for everyone” says Slytech’s CMO/CFO Federico Merle and Co-founder & Lead Product Engineer Carlo Salmini, who are introducing a more cost-efficient option with their SLYTECH ONE, a “derivative” of their SLYTECH 2ND SKIN™ XT line.



photo: Slytech

TSG also cater for “most winter sports riders” by offering “rather slim and flexible protectors that offer a great wearing comfort without restricting movements”; explains Nadja, with a special focus on the little folks with two sizes of the Backbone Junior. Evoc also add a “compact daypack with integrated back protector” for people with a shorter back, as well as more sizes to their Kids Protector Vest, Head of Marketing Jan Sallawitz states.

Women are specifically targeted in the new line from G-Form, who have also teamed up with Burton Snowboards, offering a “Total Impact Crash Short with protection at the hips and Tailbone directly targeting snowboarders.” Forcefield Body Armour have new Slam Shorts too, featuring BeCool 4 channel cross fibre thread technology, while Amplifi have “reverse engineered” the Armourgel materials of their MKII series and “integrated unique lateral stabilizers” for their new MKII Knee Pro.

SOFT SKILLS

Most brands seem to opt for soft materials these days, as they’re more comfortable to wear for most customers and are equipped with similar shock absorption qualities. According to TSG’s Nadja, hard shells’ main advantage over soft protectors is being “pierce-proof when falling on very sharp ground, which is a rather rare accident” in our sports. D3O foam “features much better impact absorbing values.”

Slytech take this even further, pointing out risks through the wrong kind of protection: “We have learned that the use of hard materials is actually the cause of broken bones and more serious injuries as a direct result of full compression of softer components upon impact, where the impact force is then accelerated through the compressed material, and a hard component directly to the body.” Hence they “reject the use of hard materials” unless it is necessary “to have a

very low friction coefficient”.

Evoc’s Jan agrees that “good soft protector concepts have the same dampening properties, sometimes even better than hardshell solutions” and mainly work with “EPS protectors for vitally important areas” and “visco elastic foam concepts from SAS Tec for joint protection like shoulders,” that can change its properties with temperature changes though.

Unaffected by temperature, you could put on Amplifi’s MKII protectors straight out of the boot of your car any crisp morning, as this “silicone polymer can be used in the cold (fine to be left in the car overnight),” explains CEO Jens Hartmann, who claims their product is “one of the, if not THE most flexible protector”.

Forcefield have “pioneered soft armour for over 25 years” says Matthew Dawson, Director of Sales and Marketing for Forcefield Body Armour. G-Form are also moving “away from the Traditional Hard Shell style pad” and use XRD foams as “just one of several ingredients” in their protective technology.

INVISIBLE SHOW OFF

With protection becoming slimmer and slimmer, customers can now pad up without having to worry about looking like the Michelin Man. “Body protection is made to protect and perform; this should be the main focus” states Nadja from TSG and Jens from Amplifi agrees: “Wear it and forget about it but it will be there when you need it.” G-Form protection is already so “low profile, it can often go unnoticed,” says Alex Sardella, Brand & Sponsorship Coordinator. Forcefield add that “the trend right now is closer fitting, slim and subtle armour - as long as the armour performs, this is fine with us.”

Evoc on the other hand “combine protection technology with a stylish piece of cloth” and “set trends in design, comfort and safety” using their journeys as inspiration. “EVOC products are always a little more than simply pieces of equipment. We believe that our customers like our products for both reasons - functionality and looks.”

Slytech’s mission is “to make the safest and most comfortable impact protection to wear under outerwear,” while “simultaneously allowing our riders to continuously express their personal style.” Yet they are “seeing more athletes wearing applicable gear outside of clothing showing that another day on the mountain is more important than their ultimate appearance,” according to Federico and Carlo.

OUTLOOK

Since “traditionally, most protection gear has been very heavy and/or not comfortable,” Slytech see that “consumers are looking to purchase high-tech and innovative gear that progress the quality of the products, and the riding experience, not hinder it.” EVOC’s Jan agrees that “the protection market is one of the strongest growing markets. As helmets are common these days, people become aware that it might makes sense to protect other parts of their body too.” So it’s most likely that this will only continue. “Not only did sports gear get much better in recent years, making higher speeds possible, but also the access to more demanding terrain got easier. Plus media is pushing the topic more and more,” Jan continues – we have a strong feeling, he’ll be proved right. 🍷

HIGHLIGHTS

Matt & Toned Down Helmet Colours

Rotational Impact Protection

Audio Integration

Soft (Gel) Protectors

Subtle, Understated, Low Profile
