

Mountain Men

Bally honors adventurers with a collection marking man's first summit to Mount Everest. BY JOCELYN ANDERSON

Talk about scaling heritage. When Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay conquered Mount Everest 60 years ago this month, the latter did so in

Bally boots. They weren't the luxury staples the brand shows at Fashion Week, but performance-focused boots with a reindeer-fur shell and a newly developed rubber sole that, for the time, used less metal near the foot and provided better insulation.

In honor of the feat, the Labelux-owned Swiss brand will release a capsule collection for fall '13 inspired by the expedition, including four men's boots based on traditional trekking and alpine styles. A few pieces arrive in Bally stores later this month, while the complete offering debuts in September.

"To demonstrate our consideration of Bally's rich heritage, its beautiful DNA and its future, this was a perfect story," said Graeme Fidler, co-creative director of Bally. "And when we found out [the brand] had done several boots and ascents, we felt it would be more relevant to make a number of different boots, rather than just focusing on one item."

The resulting styles take inspiration from adventurers. For instance, the Vilmos boot is directly influenced by Norgay's original look — this time made in chic marmot fur lined with cashmere. All the boots are built on the 360-degree nonslip Bally grip sole unit, which was patented in 1919 and re-engineered to be even lighter.

The collection also includes ready-to-wear and a range of accessories,

consisting of multifunction bags such as backpacks and weekenders.

Fidler, who designs Bally's menswear, and co-creative director Michael Herz recently spoke separately with *Footwear News* about the milestone and what it means to the Bally brand.

1 What kind of research went into creating this collection?

GF: There's documentation and beautiful notes within our archive. We delved deep into the history to the point where we've got photographs of Tenzing Norgay in one of our stores being congratulated. He was given another pair of boots as a gift. It was a great thing to think, what do we want to say to our consumer? We can't just remake something for the sake of remaking it. We obviously attempted to marry technology as best as possible with the most authentic-looking

version of the reinterpretation. And that's where we started.

2 Was it difficult to meld technology and fashion?

GF: No, I wouldn't say it was difficult. What is always a challenge, [with any] heritage brand, is producing product that is relevant for the future as opposed to replicating or remaking something from the past. But my philosophy is that one has to cautiously create and develop using the archive as inspiration and look to a number of [other] influences to create that product. If I was only to go to the archive, take a product and attempt to recreate it, it becomes simply a replica. That definitely is the wrong format, in my opinion. It's important to constantly be inspired by day-to-day activities and contemporaries around you.

3 These are more fashion than performance boots, but if someone wanted to take a hike in them, could they?

GF: Absolutely. They are very much made for the Bally client. I've already been asked, "Where do you see these being worn?" They could be worn in St. Moritz during the most [chilly] winter months, when the lakes are frozen over, or in an après ski moment, or equally on a stormy Madison Avenue winter day. I wanted them to have that versatility.

4 What have you enjoyed most about this project?

MH: Discovering the history and stories of Bally's involvement — first with the earlier Swiss expeditions, then to the climb itself and, finally, Tenzing's humility and grace during his subsequent visit to Switzerland. In our technology-filled age, it's easy to forget how raw it was only 60 years ago, the risks involved and the magnificence of what was achieved. This project has given me a moment to reflect, not only about the summit of Everest but about what it means to be a true pioneer and the commitment and sacrifice that requires.

5 Has working on this collection made you consider attempting the climb yourself?

GF: Wouldn't it be fantastic? Such an amazing journey these guys had, and obviously, explorers still comment on their experience. To be honest, I have to say I probably won't even try. [About a year ago], I was talking to a friend of mine who had just come back from Everest and attempted to climb it. He was out there for a few weeks, but he got horrendous altitude sickness quite early in the expedition. The way he explained that sickness — the way it affects your whole body and mind — has probably put me off for life. Otherwise, I might be inclined to [try it] one day.



Graeme Fidler and Michael Herz



Bally's Himalaya boot for fall '13