



# Design in Sports

Scandinavians—they want to look cool on ski slopes and skateboard ramps

*Nordic countries account for only a fraction of the world's population, but they occupy a surprising number of the top slots in competitive sports. The queen of Women's Golf, for example, is Sweden's Annika Sörenstam. The king of Le Mans, with an amazing seven victories in nine races, is virtuoso driver Tom Kristensen of Denmark. Northern Europeans are especially prominent in winter sports. Marit Bjørgen of Norway, for example, is the world's best female cross-country skier; Sweden's Anja Persson rules the roost in alpine skiing; while no one on earth can fly further from the ski jump ramp than Finland's daring Janne Ahonen.*

*And let's not forget: What would America's NFL ice hockey league be like without its capable and tough Nordic stars?*





One reason for the impressive accomplishments of Nordic athletes in global competition is that organized sports here involve a huge number of children and adults—not just the most gifted. In Sweden, for example, almost half of the country's seven million inhabitants between the ages of 7 and 70 are members of a sports club—as active competitors, keep-fitters, leaders or trainers. To put it bluntly, there is no shortage of jocks and sports fanatics in Scandinavia.

Naturally, if you live in a place where an active lifestyle is par for the course, you want to look sharp. And if you live in Scandinavia, you don't have to search very hard to find cool fashions suitable for sliding down snow-covered mountaintops, sailing across the Baltic Sea or skateboarding on the mean streets of big cities. Nordic people are not just crazy about sports—they are crazy about sporty fashions, too.

**Peak Performance**, which was started in the Swedish ski resort of

Åre in 1986, is a trendy brand for the athletically inclined. Peak, which is now part of Denmark's IC Company family, make technically sophisticated and hip-looking clothing for the ski slopes, and they are also strong in golf and training wear. Their Fall 2005 sportswear collection of warm, durable and trendy outfits is inspired by polo, rugby, basketball and baseball. We like the rugged look of this season's Ice Climber line, which includes a pair of pants in three layers suitable for off-the-beaten-path outdoor pursuits.

Naturally, Nordic people don't just get sweaty in their own back yards. When they go hiking in New Zealand or mountain climbing in Switzerland, they want to travel light. **Tenson** of Sweden, which is probably best-known for their water-tight jackets, is this year introducing its Travel Collection, made from the easy-to-wash and quick drying material Supplex, which has the feel of cotton. This light-weight cloth

### Golf with or without polar bears

Golf is a rapidly growing family sport in Scandinavia. In Denmark, for example, where the temperatures are more moderate than in the other Nordic countries, the number of golf courses has doubled so that there are now more than 140, many of which feature idyllic scenery. Over 10 of the courses are ranked at international championships levels. But there are plenty of pay-and-play courses for the amateurs featuring lake vistas, exquisite woods and gently rolling hills. Further info: [www.golfdk.dk](http://www.golfdk.dk)

If the typical sand trap isn't enough of a challenge, you might consider ice golfing on the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, some 1,000 km south of the North Pole.

Sand is not a problem in the Spitsbergen Open, which took place this year in April. However, snow blindness, extreme cold and polar bears have to be considered. White golf balls are not recommended, if you want to have a chance at a second stroke.

Players are most comfortable in thermal suits and goggles, since the temperature can drop to -30C. Security is another issue: Spotters with rifles watch out for polar bears so that no one has the caddy for lunch in the middle of the nine-hole course.







ing is make to take up hardly any space, which means the clothing is ideal to take along in a backpack, canoe or on a bike rack.

If one gets hot and sweaty from ice-climbing in the Alps or bicycling across the Mohave Desert, another clothing collection from Sweden may be just the thing. Short-sleeved T-shirts, briefs, vests and sleeveless tops in the brand new Craft Pro Cool collection breathe and transport sweat away from the body quicker than any other material on the market, according to the company.

"Being too hot when exercising is not just uncomfortable," says Jonas Peterson, product manager at Craft. "The result is that you can't manage as much, exercise becomes harder and less effective." **Craft Scandinavia**, based in the west coast town of Borås, is the king when it comes to functional underwear. They have been at it for over 30 years.

Next door in Norway, the brand-name **Helly Hansen** is a guarantee for top quality. It all started out in 1877 when Norwegian sea captain Helly Juell Hansen tried his hand in making waterproof fabrics. Today, the firm started by Hansen makes some of the most practical, dependable and stylish outdoor gear in the world. Their products are for the most demanding people who expect to be comfortable, warm and dry absolutely anywhere: on an oil platform during the storm-of-the-century, perhaps, or tracking wolves during the winter in Montana. The Scandinavian sailing and skiing crowds love Helly Hansen, but even

self-confessed couch potatoes like yours truly can appreciate a handsome dark blue HH down jacket which can withstand nearly any freezing temperature. The company already has some 30 of its own stores in North America, and expects to add 15 to 20 more per year.

Nowadays, crusty sea captains like Mr. Hansen are probably not so likely to start fashion firms. But retired sports champs routinely launch a clothing or accessories brand even before they hang up their professional tennis racket or ice hockey helmet. One example of this phenomenon is five-time Wimbledon champion **Björn Borg**, who has lent his name and personal style to a fashion company which is not only big in sexy underwear, but also makes bags, tennis wear, eyewear, footwear, fragrances and swimwear.

Extreme sports have also had an impact on the fashion industry that far outweighs the relatively small number of active participants. Norwegian hardcore, triple freestyle skiing world champion **Kari Traa**, for example, develops and designs very cool casual and sportswear, primarily the first layer that skiers wear next to their skin to stay warm. Her next collection will have a glam theme, using a lot of white, gold and black. Freestyle skiers (in case you live in a deprived area without snow) are the ones who soar in the sky doing all sorts of incredible aerial acrobatics. Kari is currently looking for a distributor in North America.



Another hot name to watch in the field of fashions influenced by youth-sports culture is **WESC** (We Are the Superlative Conspiracy). This Stockholm-based group offers a skateboarding-inspired men's and women's collection, some of which is made in cooperation with international names like Mr. Kazuki of Japan (best known as the creator of ultra-hip Bathing Ape products.) The folks at WESC have also created a collection of tennis shoes produced in cooperation with Adidas. This WE-people have concept stores in Sweden and Germany, as well as Seoul, South Korea and Beverly Hills, California.

When it comes to sports equipment, Finland is in a league all its own. In fact, the largest sports equipment maker in the world, **Amer Sports**, is based in Finland. Wilson Sporting Goods, one of Amer brands, is as familiar to Americans as apple pie. There is hardly a Yank alive who hasn't thrown a Wilson baseball or football. Finnish-owned Wilson also makes gear for other sports ranging from badminton and tennis to volleyball.

Any diver worth his or her salt has probably heard about **Suunto**, which makes diving instruments, compasses and other sports gadgets. Atomic, a major player in skiing and snowboarding equipment, is yet another member of the sporty Amer clan.

## Jeans with a sporty edge

When high-end casual fashion brand J.Lindeberg started to make golf apparel in 1997, many people shook their heads in confusion.

"The golfers did not understand fashion and the fashion people did not understand why JL did golf clothing. I even had to have two different web-sites in the beginning since the two worlds were so far apart," says company founder Johan Lindeberg.

Lindeberg enlisted top golfers like Jesper Parnevik Hank Kuehne, Camilo Villegas, Fredrik Jacobson and Aaron Baddeley as ambassadors for his Future Sports Collection.

The international brand moved into what it calls "Future Sports," adding ski-ware and street-preppy sportswear into the mix. Now, rock-loving fashion maven Johan Lindeberg has gone full-circle, back to his denim roots with jeans company Diesel. For Fall/Winter 2005, he is launching Future Sports Jeans, which feature rivets in hot pink. They are already a hit with free skier Jon Olsson, one of the jocks on the J.Lindeberg sports team:

"It is the first time I am wearing jeans which have the volume that I want and still hang really well on my hips," says Olsson.

Further info: [www.jlindeberg.com](http://www.jlindeberg.com)





The pioneering role of Finland in designing nifty stuff for athletes and fitness-minded people is exemplified by that country's virtual creation of a new sport. In autumn 1997, in cooperation with Finnish sports foundations, a company named **Exel** introduced Nordic Walking, which is basically walking with poles. Since then this healthy but somewhat odd-looking activity has become the fifth most popular form of physical exercise in Finland, and is rapidly spreading throughout the world.

Runners, cyclists, fitness aficionados and techno-lovers are probably already familiar with **Polar**, the folks who make gadgets that bring training and physical education into the 21st century. We are talking about boy-toys like heart rate monitors and TriFIT assessment systems. They come from Finland, too.

When it comes to combining slick design, functionality and fun, the small Finnish **Icon Snowboards** is better than most. They proudly call themselves the "Immortal Cowboys of the North." Check out the cowboys' classy filigree design on their Prospect 164 all-terrain Board.

The distinctive style we recognize from IVANA Helsinki or Marimekko can be recognized in the fresh look and strong colors of sportswear from Finland, such as Rukka's golf garments, jogging and track suits. Some of the most eye-catching gear **Rukka** makes are their snowmobiling and motorcycle outfits.

Although Finland isn't a heavily populated country, it seems like there is nothing they don't make when it comes to an active lifestyle. **Halti**, whose name in English ironically suggests a limping gait, produces about everything the high-achieving hiker or camper might require. The product range, which also features products specifically



for hunters and fishermen, covers the entire great outdoors with an unbelievably broad assortment of equipment and clothing.

Yet another Finnish firm with a solid foundation in the world of athletics is **Karhu**, which was founded in 1916. Sports fanatics and aficionados of footwear should visit their idiosyncratic website [www.karhuoriginals.com](http://www.karhuoriginals.com), where one can not only check out the footwear, but can read lively accounts of Nordic athletic heroes of yesteryear, such as Urho Kaleva Kekkonen, high jump champ in 1924 and later president of the country; European champion runner Martti Vaino; and the discus thrower known as the "Bear of Malmö," Ricky Bruch, a colourful figure who starred in Danish soft-porn movies and became a singer after his sports career ended.

The surprisingly strong connection between Finnish design and sports was the theme, by the way, of a major exhibition this summer at **Design Forum Finland**.



## More information

### Links to sporty stuff

Amer, [www.amersports.com](http://www.amersports.com), [amer.communications@amersports.com](mailto:amer.communications@amersports.com)  
 Björn Borg, [www.bjornborg.net](http://www.bjornborg.net), [info@bjornborg.net](mailto:info@bjornborg.net)  
 Craft of Scandinavia, [www.craft.se](http://www.craft.se), [info@craft.se](mailto:info@craft.se)  
 Design Forum Finland, [www.designforum.fi](http://www.designforum.fi), [info@designforum.fi](mailto:info@designforum.fi)  
 Exel, [www.nordicwalking.com](http://www.nordicwalking.com), [cs@nordicwalking.net](mailto:cs@nordicwalking.net), [www.exel.fi](http://www.exel.fi)  
 Halti, [www.halti.fi](http://www.halti.fi), [halti@halti.com](mailto:halti@halti.com)  
 Helly Hansen, [www.hellyhansen.com](http://www.hellyhansen.com), USA tel. 1-425 378 8700  
 Hummel, [www.hummelamerica.com](http://www.hummelamerica.com), [info@hummelamerica.com](mailto:info@hummelamerica.com)  
 Icon, [www.iconsnowboards.com](http://www.iconsnowboards.com), [jarkko.kauranen@iconsnowboards.com](mailto:jarkko.kauranen@iconsnowboards.com)  
 Karhu, [www.karhuoriginals.com](http://www.karhuoriginals.com), [Karhuoriginalsusa@brandforce.biz](mailto:Karhuoriginalsusa@brandforce.biz)  
 Kari Traa, [www.karitraa.com](http://www.karitraa.com), [info@karitraa.com](mailto:info@karitraa.com)  
 Peak Performance, [www.peakperformance.com](http://www.peakperformance.com), [mail.us@peakperformance.se](mailto:mail.us@peakperformance.se)  
 Polar, [www.polar.fi](http://www.polar.fi), [helpdesk@polar.fi](mailto:helpdesk@polar.fi)  
 Rukka, [www.rukka.com](http://www.rukka.com), tel. Finland 358 (3) 822 111  
 Suunto, [www.suunto.com](http://www.suunto.com), [info@suunto.com](mailto:info@suunto.com)  
 Tenson, [www.tenson.com](http://www.tenson.com), [info@tenson.com](mailto:info@tenson.com)  
 WESC, [www.wesc.com](http://www.wesc.com), USA tel. 1- 310 385 9315



## Relaxed kicks from down south

While some Nordic sports-fashion brands associate themselves with sweaty activities such as soccer or testosterone-sports like snowboarding, Tretorn, based in the southern Sweden town of Helsingborg has a more relaxed, down to earth style. Their Spring/Summer 2005 collection of sneakers with a prepie look is intended to let you enjoy nature's simple pleasures. This footwear, which has long been a staple in country clubs throughout New England and on tennis courts around the world, allows you to be casually chic while practicing your backhand at the club, testing the breeze in a sailboat off of Nantucket sound or window shopping in the French Riviera.

Established in 1891 by Henry Dunker, the company which is now part of the Puma group started out by making rubber boots, and the company is still big in galoshes. But Tretorn, which is Europe's third-largest producer of tennis balls, is probably best known for its tennis shoes. During the 1970s, for example, tennis shoes by Tretorn was the first choice of legends like Martina or Björn Borg, Chris Evert and Billie Jean King.

More info, see: [www.tretorn.com](http://www.tretorn.com)