



# Euro style

In Europe the Sports Leisure and Classic category continues to grow its market share at the expense of performance shoes, says the NPD Group

**Over the past three decades the market for athletic footwear has been very dynamic. Sports shoe manufacturers have tried to respond to rapidly changing consumer patterns and gradually the market has become broader and more diverse.**

The number of consumers interested in products for leisure purposes grew, with athletic footwear becoming a fashion item during the 1980s when icons from the world of art, music, sport and fashion began wearing sports fashion footwear. Since then, a new category in the footwear market emerged under the 'Sports Leisure and Classic' banner, also referred to as the 'Sports Inspired' category.

### Fashion focused

How is the category evolving in Europe's big five countries (Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain)? Since 2003 the Sports Leisure and Classic category has enjoyed 10.9 per cent year-on-year growth in Europe's big five (see table). The sport footwear market is consequently becoming more and more fashion focused.

The Sports Leisure and Classic category is the biggest segment in terms of market share within the sports footwear market in Europe, exceeding 50 per cent in GB and Italy, 40 per cent in France and 30 per cent in Spain and Germany last year (source: The NPD Group POS Retail Panel).

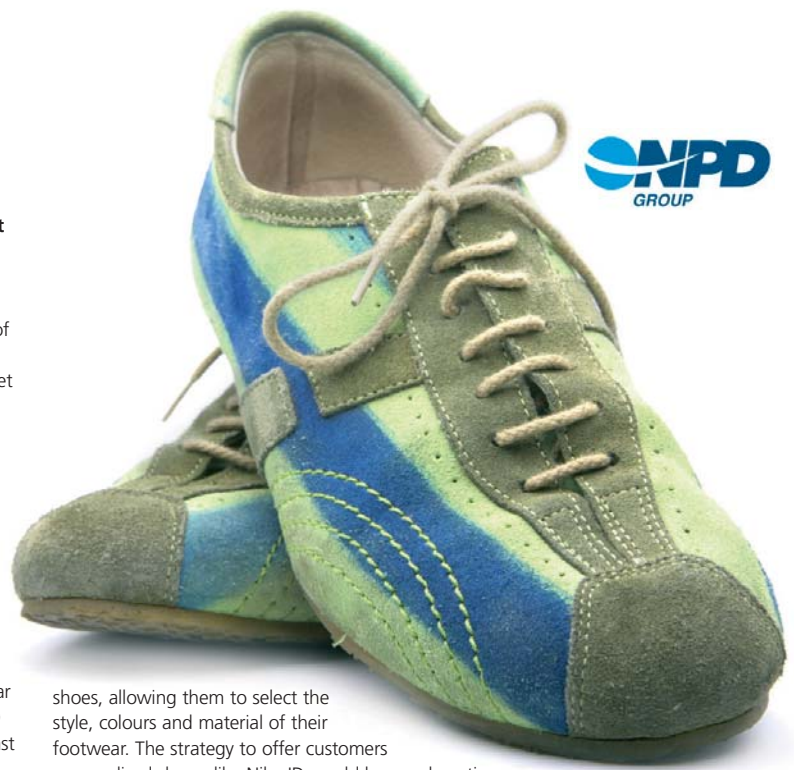
This category grew across the big five countries in 2007, with GB registering the strongest growth - a double-digit increase compared to 2006. Furthermore, Sports Leisure and Classic shoes are generally heading the best-seller lists. Last year saw the Nike Air Max 95, Adidas Racer Low and Asics' Whizzer Low eclipsing performance shoes by being the best-sellers in Great Britain, Spain and France respectively.

The Sports Leisure and Classic category is probably the most competitive sector within the sports footwear industry, as on top of the sports footwear manufacturers large retail chains such as Decathlon, JJB and JD Sports sell their own labels, while brown shoe suppliers like Geox, which is considering opening 400 new stores in Europe in the next three years, have entered the market by selling sports leisure shoes.

This fierce competition leads to a wide and diverse choice of Sports Leisure and Classic shoes covering all price points. Consumers can choose between the Nike Air Max, designed with some performance features thanks to its air cushioning unit, the Asics Whizzer, a wrestling-inspired shoe, or shoes such as the Reebok Classic Leather.

### Personalised shoes

Some suppliers of athletic footwear have gone one step further by transforming customers into designers of their own



shoes, allowing them to select the style, colours and material of their footwear. The strategy to offer customers personalised shoes, like Nike iD, could be very lucrative as consumers are willing to pay a premium to express their individuality and the manufacturer can reap the rewards of also being the retailer. Furthermore, it strengthens brand loyalty as consumers are more attached to the brand when they are involved in the conception of their footwear.

Teenagers and the 18-34-year-old market account for most of the sales of Sports Leisure and Classic shoes, but they have also become more popular among the older generation. The growing success of this category of footwear is the result of a higher acceptance of Sports Leisure and Classic shoes in our daily life. It is not rare nowadays to see women rapidly changing their high heels straight after work for comfortable athletic footwear. It is also a common sight to see men and women going to work in their sports-inspired shoes.

Manufacturers have understood the importance of this continuously evolving market by constantly stimulating the demand of fashion conscious consumers with new alternatives of sports leisure footwear, and it is likely that in Europe the Sports Leisure and Classic category will continue to grow its market share at the expense of performance shoes. 📈

The NPD Group monitors the sales of sports footwear and sports apparel in many countries around the world. For more information contact The NPD Group sports team on 01932 355580.

**SPORT LEISURE AND CLASSIC MARKET SIZE (€ million) IN EUROPE (BIG 5)**  
Source: NPD European Sports Footwear Consumer Panel

