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People Stories

Stepping into the future: The Canadian Footwear Brand Cougar Shoes' 75-year journey of originality and innovation.

From the birth of the iconic Pillow Boot to the Michelin collaboration

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Iconic Tan Pillow Boot. Photo Credit: Cougar Shoes



Cougar Shoes is a company of humble origins that produces fashionable, durable women's footwear designed in Canada and sold around the world.

The business is family-owned and operated by Walter Sedlbauer's sons, who inherited the reins from their father, the entrepreneur who founded Cougar Shoes in Ontario in 1948. Seventy-five years later, Steve and Ron Sedlbauer continue to lead their father's company, offering footwear that can embrace every season.



Meridian Nylon Waterproof Winter Boot with PrimaLoft®
Photo credit: Cougar Shoes and The Long & Short of Style on Instagram

To mark this significant anniversary, the company has come up with several new designs, including a new collaboration with Michelin, called the Cougar Collection; these shoes boast winter technology and soles inspired by Michelin tires, providing exceptional grip on ice and snow.

The brand has a special place in the hearts of Canadians, primarily due to the creation, in 1976, of a product that has now become an iconic symbol – the Pillow Boot. This waterproof winter boot with its soft cushioned leather and insulated red fleece lining keeps consumers dry and warm. Over 8 million pairs have been sold to date.

In commemoration of Cougar's anniversary and partnership with Michelin, we spoke with Steve Sedlbauer, co-owner and president, to explore the rich history of this legendary Canadian trademark.

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Reading the quote *Cougar really is a trailblazer* gives the message of how the brand has revolutionized and redefined the world of women's footwear. Could you tell us more?

We've been in business since 1948 and are proud to be celebrating our 75th year!



The Pillow Boot
Photo credit: [Cougar Shoes](#)

In 1976, we created "The Pillow Boot," a practical, durable, winter boot influenced by the work boots that put Cougar Shoes on the map. We became one of the few Canadian companies to create a product that would become a part of our heritage. The no-nonsense, though not unattractive, Pillow Boot was built first for function; a boot to keep feet warm and dry.

We used soft, padded caramel leather for this lace-up, rubber-soled boot distinguished by its red felt lining. It met the needs of a country that knew a thing or two about long, cold winters and shoveling snow. Canadians bought more than 8 million pairs of Pillow Boots and asked for them by name, calling them "Cougar Boots." Our brand had worked its way into Canadians' hearts.

*Today, **Cougar truly is a trailblazer!** We are a global style leader that produces premium, always waterproof, four-season footwear playing on our Canadian roots. We remain true to our heritage by mixing the fashion with function that we have always been known for. The result is modern, innovative footwear for today's consumer.*

We noticed that you have a very extensive footwear catalogue... from boots, to sneakers to more summery footwear like sandals.

We were wondering why you make shoes exclusively for women? Are there any reasons related more to the history of the brand or is it more of a choice related to the production and manufacturing of the product?

*We currently design for women and produce a Spring-Summer and Fall-Winter Collection with many styles that are transitional and can extend between seasons, especially because they are always waterproof. **Women's footwear has always been our core business**, and we are not opposed to expanding, however we feel there is lots of opportunity for growth still, before we consider expanding.*

“ We also create a premium kids' collection of winter boots that is sold in Canada.



Cougar boots for kids
Photo credit: [Cougar shoes](#)

What are the essential features that each of your

What are the essential features that each of your footwear must have? Where do you take inspiration from when designing the models? Can you give us an example of a model that is particularly important to the brand?

Inspiration can come from anywhere really – travel, music, art, the internet! So many things factor into design.

For me, travel is a big one in terms of influence. I make a point of travelling to different destinations each season and not only looking at retail stores but I like to sit in cafes and people watch – just seeing what people are actually wearing on their feet and how they've styled their outfits serves as a creative energy for me.

Our archives also serve as great inspiration. We refer to our Pillow Boot as our "iconic puff" and it's something we continually look back to when drawing inspiration for future designs. You will see hints of the "puff" design reinterpreted in a modern way both in our boot and sandal designs today. It's really rooted in the DNA of the brand.



Our debut of the Cougar x Soles by Michelin is in step with our DNA as well.

“ This exciting collection offers women hybrid winter boots that meld Michelin soles and winter technology with fashion-forward style. Like our original, iconic Pillow Boot, it’s a groundbreaking and offers the performance and style Cougar is known for.

SCULPTURE DESIGN
Sculpture with thick 8.5mm designed for adherence and traction. Stickers on the sides of lugs for support and self-cleaning.

TREAD DESIGN
The constant contact with the ground ensures better adhesion.

TREAD SPACING
Tread space provides channels for traction and flexibility.

RUBBER COMPOUND
Designed for cold temperatures and soft winter climates with firm grip on ice and snow. Good durability on multiple terrains.

Union Leather and Suede Waterproof Winter Boot with PrimaLoft® and soles by Michelin
Photo credit: Cougar shoes

It was a real pleasure to speak with President Steve Sedlbauer, whose explosiveness brings out passion and dedication.

While focusing primarily on women's footwear, Cougar remains open to growth opportunities and plans to expand its product offerings in the future. The brand's extensive heritage and commitment to excellence ensure that Cougar will continue to leave a lasting imprint on the footwear industry in Canada and beyond for years to come.

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