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GunTV hits the airwaves Jan. 20 as firearm demand, talk increase.

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Heading into the all-important final two weeks of 2015, New England ski resorts and winter apparel retailers along the Eastern Seaboard were holding out hope. Panic hadn't yet set in for everyone.

The holiday week between Christmas and New Year's is typically a bonanza for family skiing and winter sports activities across the region. It can account for as much as 20 percent of a resort's annual revenue. And the 2014-15 season, despite starting off slow, was sensational for all winter-related businesses in the region as more than 110 inches of snow blanketed the Boston area over a seven-week period from mid-January.

The late fall weather this year has not been typical. The West and Midwest have been wetter than normal. And the densely populated Eastern Seaboard has enjoyed unseasonably warm temperatures, sending shoppers out in shorts for holiday shopping and hats, outerwear and fleece sitting on shelves despite discounts as high as 50 percent. More than 1000 municipalities broke temperature records during the second week of December.

Blame El Niño, a seasonal pattern that develops when the ocean's surface temperatures are warmer than average in the

equatorial Pacific for more than a season. Some forecasters contend this season's El Niño impact will be the strongest since 1997-98.

This means, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), that expectations are for a milder than average winter that typically correlates with less snow.

That likelihood coupled with fall's warm finale in the East has had retailers looking for solutions to inventory gluts some 10 days before Christmas. Winter accessory sales were down 10 percent and boot sales slipped seven percent year-over-year in November. Meanwhile, Planalytics estimates that outerwear sales in Boston, Chicago, New York and Philadelphia were off more than 30 percent from last year's levels. Increasing discounts on slow-moving winter merchandise will negatively impact seasonal margin rates for those retailers unable to return garments to vendors to sell through their own outlets.

Unless winter arrives with a bluster (forecasts called for more seasonal temps on the final shopping weekend before Christmas.), look for public retailers to blame Mother Nature when they report year-end results in February and March. ■

Monday,
Dec 21 / 2016

Exiting

Polartec is officially leaving Lawrence.

Expanding

Nike, Adidas and Under Armour prepare for growth.

Moving

Snow Sports Show gets revamp, date shift in 2017.



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New podcasts return January 4 with Kelly Davis, director of research at Snowsports Industries America. In the meantime, head over to www.insideinsight.com/podcasts to listen to any of our 2015 podcasts, including:

Tony Armand,
United Sports Brands

Kevin Davis,
Performance Sports Group

Gary Smith,
Polartec

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New Brand Eyes Specific Conditions



Mishmi Takin's Kameng hiker features a Vibram Megagrip outsole.
Source: Mishmi Takin

Future purpose-built product will target other specific climates, including a "desert runner" designed for speed on sandy surfaces.

After a soggy and slippery hike in the Himalayas, Kapil Dev Singh saw an opportunity — to create ultra-breathable performance hiking boots designed to perform in tropical conditions. New outdoor line Mishmi Takin, named after the endangered goat-antelope species native to India, Myanmar and China, is the result.

Launching for Fall '16, the line of three unisex made-in-Romania hikers (the brand will also launch both hard and soft-shell jackets) use direct venting and an eVent waterproof breathable membrane to amp up breathability in humid conditions, as well as Vibram's Megagrip rubber outsoles to keep things stable no matter how slick.

The line, he said, grew out of his own experiences hiking in his native India.

"I've done quite a bit of hiking in New England and all my gear worked very well, but what I found was the same gear was not working very well in India," Singh says. "India is a hot, tropical country and I found that my feet were becoming very hot — and waterproof shoes were not comfortable."

The reason, he said, is that most hiking gear is designed for use in Europe and North America, climates where the standard waterproof membrane works well. But

in highly wet and humid places, he says, a typical membrane — which relies on a differential between the levels of humidity inside and outside of the shoe — doesn't work. The breathable vented design and eVent membrane mean the three Mishmi Takin styles will keep feet dry and comfortable in tropical conditions, but should also work in other wet areas, such as the damp of the Pacific Northwest.

In January, the brand will launch a Kickstarter campaign, supported by social media, to raise awareness (as well as some capital) for the July-August launch.

"[The outdoor market] is a crowded field, there are big brands out there and we don't have any name recognition," he admits.

The shoes, which will retail from \$190 to \$230, will go into production after the Kickstarter closes. In the U.S., the line will be sold on Amazon.com and on Mishmi Takin's e-commerce site to start, and Singh says the brand is looking to add retail partners. In India, where the line will launch simultaneously, the strategy will be similar, with the brand relying on its own e-commerce.

Singh is already working on future purpose-built product to target other specific climates. Future shoes could include a "desert runner" designed for speed on sandy surfaces.

"There are lots of other countries where we'd like to penetrate," he says. "I think of ourselves as a truly international brand — not to bash other brands, but many global brands tend to focus on U.S. and European markets and then take that product to the other markets. We have a different mindset. We're going to design for those different conditions, and then sell in those markets." ■

— By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry