

Equi-business Profile: Ecogold — saddle pad specialist to Canada's dressage stars

by Dorothy McDonald

You might think it requires quite a leap of the imagination to go from manufacturing environmentally-friendly backpacks to innovative equine gear, but when your trigger is a request from the University of

Ottawa (U of O) equestrian team to develop team jackets, what more do you need?

And so it was that a textile manufacturer producing exclusively student backpacks and jackets for university stores across Canada jumped into the equestrian product world.

"It was quite fortuitous actually," notes Patricia Da Silva, VP of Marketing, "because at the time we were facing stiff competition from places like China in the production of backpacks. The request from the U of O simply helped us to identify a new market niche ideally suited to the types of textiles we were producing."

From backpacks to saddle pads

Ecogold is a family-owned and operated business, founded in 1989 by Patricia's father, John Da Silva, a

textile engineer trained in Europe and the U.S. Through his business, John introduced a line of backpacks and sportswear made with fabrics manufactured using a new technology which created energy by recycling hot air. These environmentally-friendly backpacks were an instant hit in campuses across Canada. In 2002,

approached by the U of O equestrian team, John adapted his business to facilitate the production of equestrian jackets. These were so well received that soon, after visiting various barns and conducting casual research on horse/rider

needs, he expanded the business and developed a frictionless saddle pad which, over time, has become the company's primary product.

A family affair

Patricia joined the family business as VP of Marketing in 1997 following a stint at Domtar as a product manager. "I really enjoy the creativity of building a business this close to the front line," she notes. "Meeting the owners and riders and finding out what's important to them and their horses' needs helps us, as non-horse people, to be able to provide the kind of equipment they need to be competitive. This also allows us to expand our product line so that there's always a demand for the quality products we have to offer."

Also involved in running the business is Patricia's mother, Carmina, the financial whiz. John, Carmina and Patricia each owns a one-third share of the business.

Frictionless™ Saddle Pad

The company's major claim to fame to date is its Frictionless™ saddle pad, described on its website (www.ecogold.ca)


as the "... ultimate in comfort for the dressage horse." The website goes on to describe it as "... a n u l t r a - lightweight saddle pad, made with lycra and air-knit, two high-tech fabrics that slide in contact with one another during use, eliminating any friction on the horse's back and quickly evaporating moisture, creating the most comfortable condition for the horse."

Evidently, some of Canada's top dressage riders, including Shannon Dueck, Leslie Reid, Ashley Holzer and Jacqueline Brooks have taken this to heart. All have discovered that this saddle pad provides the ideal conditions for their horses to perform a comfortable and successful ride. Over time, the product has expanded to include the hunter/jumper market where top riders such as Erynn Ballard and Amy Millar are taking advantage of the high-tech saddle pads. For Ecogold this has spelled only good news — sales have tripled since 2005! Most of the company's clients are competitive riders.

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www.ecogold.ca



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