

Industry and Commerce



Swann dri operations manager Warren Davis is pictured with some of the clothing produced by the Waitara company.

Legendary 'swanny' —57 years on and still going strong

Don't dryclean them — just wear them through the drench.

Such is the durability and quality of the Waitara-manufactured Swann dri — affectionately known throughout New Zealand as the swanny or lambie.

The traditional red/black blue/black checked garment has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1930, when Waitara resident John McKendrick used the Swann dri brand for products made in Waitara at the Clifton Clothing Company.

But one mistake made in the 1940s still lives with the company — the brand name was incorrectly spelt with two Ns, and has been left incorrect to this day.

Clifton Clothing Company began by making the garment which has become a legend — the basic swanny.

It then produced the bush shirt, and despite new ranges being launched, these two garments are still the bread and butter of the internationally acclaimed range.

New Zealand-based company Alliance Textiles bought out John McKendrick in 1973. Alliance Textile's Palmerston North and Timaru mills now supply the Waitara plant with all its fabric.

The Swann dri is made from 100% wool fibre. A cross-bred wool renowned for high quality and hard wearing potential is used.

There is nothing modern about the weaving process of the fabric. The fabric is shrunk in a controlled way to enhance moisture resistance. By winding rolls of material through a washer and drier a width of material is reduced 20%.

Many lost trampers have been thankful for the

waterproofing that process provides.

In the South Island a ridge has been named Swanny Ridge, after the Swann dri. It was named by a man who got lost on the ridge. He said the bush shirt he was wearing when he became lost saved his life.

Stories circulate too, of men who have fallen in the sea, and put their life down to the fact they were wearing Swann dris at the time.

But now the swannies are coming off the farmers' shoulders and going on just about anyone's shoulders. Whole families are going bush in the cities.

This year Swann dri has sought to "upmarket" its products from workwear to leisure/casual wear garments.

The Swann dri is exported to Australia, Japan, United States, England and Canada, and in these countries our casual swanny is considered more of a fashion garment.

Barry Crump can easily visualise the swanny as a fashion feature: "If you've got a bit of gut it doesn't show in a swanny," he says.

Swann dri already occupies a good share of the market in Australia, and management hope that in the next two years it will have a good hold on the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan markets.

The company hopes to sell 200,000 garments in the next year. These are manufactured 12 months of the year by 103 people at the Waitara factory, to meet a five-month market.

More than \$500,000 worth of garments are already exported annually.

The company is now looking at extending its

range into fishermen rib jerseys.

Swann dri has become a generic term throughout New Zealand. People ask for a Swann dri and they are shown lookalikes but the company is seeking to promote its trademark swan as the genuine label of quality.

The company does not claim its garments are the cheapest — it claims they are the best.

Swann dris have become standard issue for many firms — they are part of dozens of uniforms. New Zealand is defended by

soldiers in Swann dris and the Royal New Zealand Navy wear Swann dris you can see in a storm.

It was even written into the site agreement during the construction of the Syn-fuel plant at Motunui, that construction workers were to be supplied swannies.



The Zipped Bushshirt.

An open or shut case. All the original rugged Swann dri bush shirt features with the extra ease of a full heavy duty zip and warm detachable hood. Available in 6 patterns.



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