

PRETTY POLLY

A GREAT BRITISH BRAND!

THE PRETTY POLLY BRAND CAN TRACE ITS ROOTS BACK TO 1919, WHEN TWO MANUFACTURING TECHNICIANS SET UP A FACTORY FOR LADIES' STOCKINGS MANUFACTURING IN SUTTON IN ASHFIELD. THE COMPANY WHICH ALSO PRODUCES ARISTOC AND ELBEO HOSIERY HAS INEVITABLY BEEN THROUGH A SERIES OF BUYOUTS AND CHANGES OF OWNERSHIP IN THE LAST 95 YEARS BUT IS VIRTUALLY UNIQUE IN STILL MAINTAINING A HEALTHY AND DYNAMIC PRODUCTION SITE IN THE UK (NOW IN WEST MILL IN BELPER). THE MOST RECENT CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP TO PD ENTERPRISES LTD IN 2006 (A PRIVATELY OWNED COMPANY BASED IN HONG KONG) RESULTED IN SERIOUS NEW INVESTMENT IN MACHINERY AND TECHNOLOGY FOR THE DERBYSHIRE BASED COMPANY, HERALDING A NEW PERIOD OF GROWTH AND CONFIDENCE. PAMELA SCOTT VISITED THEIR HEADQUARTERS TO FIND OUT MORE.

PRETTY POLLY as a brand has always been something of a trailblazer in hosiery development and production (see inset table) but the company is probably just as well known for its memorable advertising and promotional campaigns. From the ground-breaking 1980's TV 'Lady in a Jaguar' advert through to creating headlines with their vertical poster advertisements with the 'Long Legs' campaign accompanied by a 30-foot poster and the link-up with Eva Herzigova in 1998 in a national advertising campaign, Pretty Polly has brought us some of the most iconic advertising images in the last 3-4 decades. In addition they have created some very successful link-ups with pop stars such as Rachel Stevens, Jamelia, Sugababes and Jessie J bringing the brand to a whole new generation of wearers. Their collaboration with designer Henry Holland in 2009 created an experimental and quirky range of tights that not only displayed the brand's

technical expertise but was a commercial success at retail level.

With a new Managing Director, David Donnelly, appointed in April 2013 and the experienced Jane Gwyther now heading up Sales and Marketing, supported by a team of women including Margaret Simes as Sales Director, the company is re-establishing its credentials as the UK's No. 1 hosiery supplier. As Jane explains: "The West Mill site is totally devoted to hosiery and socks now – everything is housed here from production, administration, sales and marketing, customer support and despatch. Since the buyout by PD Enterprises in 2006 we have enjoyed a period of stability, consistent investment and expansion and we can meet the future with confidence. We are lucky that the owners believe in supporting British manufacturing which means we can simultaneously sustain our 'local' heritage in Derbyshire and promote Pretty Polly



One of the exciting additions to the shaping range: longline shaping short

Pretty Polly as a brand has always been something of a trailblazer in hosiery and its history is marked by a series of firsts:

- 1959 Pretty Polly introduced the first ever non-run seam free stockings;
- 1967 Pretty Polly invented and launched Hold-Ups;
- 1982 Pretty Polly introduced Lycra® into 15 denier ranges and were the first hosiery brand to successfully combine ultrafine bare Lycra® with a fine denier textured yarn;
- 1989 Pretty Polly became the first company worldwide to produce 5 denier tights;
- 1999 Pretty Polly introduced tights to suit all shades of women's skin;
- 2005 Pretty Polly was recognised and awarded Superbrand status;
- 2013 Pretty Polly awarded Cool-Brands status



The kick off to the Working Women campaign with Virgin Atlantic



The new logo 'A Great British Brand' on all Pretty Polly packaging

as a truly British brand. And we have the technical capability and expertise as seen in our Elbeo and Aristoc labels.”

The company produce for both well-known High Street names and multiples on the contract side as well as as their 3 key legwear brands: Pretty Polly, Elbeo and Aristoc. Jane adds, “It is a pyramid of product starting with contract moving right up to premium branded hosiery. Of course the contract market is extremely competitive and this is where the steady investment in the factory site has enabled us to sustain the own label business.”

In terms of the brands, Jane comments: “We are evolving the Pretty Polly and Aristoc brands by differentiating them further, aiming them at separate consumer groups. Aristoc of course has a lot of performance attributes aimed at a discerning customer who will pay a premium for a product that offers additional benefits. Pretty Polly is fun, flirty and accessible, more inclusive and indeed more accessible in both price point and at distribution channel. Elbeo continues to look after its customer base: a tremendously loyal consumer who is buying a well loved and well understood product.”

Jane and her team have a number of initiatives up and running for 2014. As she explains: “As leading UK manufacturers of legwear I think we can act as ‘champions’ for women’s legs! Women are working harder than ever (over a third of all women in the UK spend more than 5 hours of their

working day on their feet!) and with our experience we believe we can offer them affordable and attractive legwear. That’s why we have launched the **Working Women** campaign, conveying the benefits of wearing hosiery everyday – the first step in this was our becoming the preferred hosiery supplier to the cabin crew and ground staff of Virgin Atlantic at the end of 2013, providing tights from the Pretty Polly ‘Light Support’ range which boosts circulation, reduces swelling and gives all-round support.” This collaboration is just the start of a series of partnerships that will be rolled out this year and beyond. Dovetailing into this working women theme is the launch in January 2014 of their new series of garments under the ‘Shape It Up’ Collection – camisoles, shaping shorts and leggings.

And Pretty Polly is certainly a ‘master’ of collaborative partnerships, notably with Henry Holland for the House of Holland legwear range in 2009, with Irish designer, Joanne Hynes, and with new York based label Alice & Olivia in Autumn 2013, supporting British talent such as Patternity and the planned April 2014 launch of Hello Kitty legwear for the UK as part of Kitty’s 40th birthday celebrations.

Margaret Simes, Sales Director, adds: “Aristoc Hosiery has been clearly positioned as beautiful but affordable hosiery with prices ranging from £8 to £18 (for the cashmere product) offering value for money

and primarily designed for department stores and independent outlets. Spring 2014 sees the rollout of a promotional programme with regular updates running right through to the summer.”

“We are enhancing our brands to add value for the consumer and also to bring them to a more international audience,” Jane comments. Of course, Pretty Polly already has a New York office selling to household names there such as Nordstrom’s, Bloomingdales, Macys, Lord & Taylor and many others with premium fashion & shaping products, opaques and sheers. Key accounts such as Shoppers Drugmart in Canada, Target in Australia and Karlstadt in Germany are working closely with the brand.

The emphasis on Pretty Polly as a great British Brand can be seen in promotional materials, social media and the company website. Jane adds, “We are proud of the fact that we can produce virtually any type of hosiery product here, more basic lines at competitive pricing right through to fully fashioned and highly technical performance garments. We can be proud of our British heritage.”

So what’s next for this unique and most resilient of British brands? Jane says: “Well we are always looking at new designs, new projects and new collaborations to heighten the profile of the brands but my next really big task will be getting ready for our centenary in 2019. It’s only 5 years away!.”

THE WEST MILL PRODUCTION SITE

On a whistle-stop factory tour it was possible to see the level of investment in both machinery and personnel over the last few years to ensure that it is a world class player in hosiery production at all stages of the production process.

- 3 new backroom boilers;
- New dyeing machinery doubling dye capacity per lot (primarily for opaques sector);
- A total of 472 knitting machines (primarily Lonati and Matec) checked every 48 hours;
- New Radio Frequency Dryer;
- The latest boarding machinery which

speeds up packaging, particularly for more basic products;

- An online packaging machine which has been developed for open hang sell hosiery, keeping down costs and increasing efficiency;
- 4 pick and place machines;
- Experienced colour testing with colour technologists;
- 24 hour working capacity with two 8 hour shifts as normal on most processes;
- 8 staff devoted to research & development of new products (for branded sales) and coming up with new solutions/ designs for existing contract customers;

- Rigorous examination of quality at all stages of the production process, colour and light testing.

Walking around with Steve Moss, the factory manager, it is clear how he and the factory staff are meticulous and proud of the work they do. “Working in such a competitive marketplace as hosiery means you really cannot afford expensive mistakes so we ensure there are checks in place at every stage – from when the yarn is delivered right through to final packing of the finished garment. We could not do this without an experienced workforce and the essential but capital heavy investment in machinery that modern day hosiery demands.”



Steam Pressing



Dye house at West Mill in Belper



Knitting Floor