

Media Release
14 April 2008

How to make a gumboot

If you fancy turning your hand to making a pair of gumboots, you'll need a friction counter, rubber vamp and top bind for starters. Those are just three of the 19 pieces that make up ½ a pair of Skellerup's Red Band Gumboots.

Red Band Gumboots celebrate their 50th anniversary this year but despite the changes that time and technology have forged in all areas of our lives, these gumboots haven't changed a bit.

Apart, that is, from the inclusion of a sponge insole for a bit of extra comfort. But other than that, it's the same formulation and specifications that were created 50 years ago.

There are seven steps to making a pair of gumboots:

1. Take some natural rubber mix it with carbon black, oil, fillers and curatives. Be extremely careful with the measurements of each as the slightest error will mean you don't get the right physical properties of the mixed compound.
2. Once the mixture has settled, send off a small slug of it to the heel moulding machine which compresses and then heats the rubber into a heel shape.
3. Feed some of the rubber through a series of metal rollers known as calenders that produces rubber sheets. Like making home-made pasta, continue rolling until the sheets are the right thickness. The calendars then imprint the pattern of the sole into the rubber. Use a heated knife to cut out the pattern.
4. Feed more rubber into another series of calendars this time without the imprints and leaving a perfectly smooth finish on the surface. Use a heated knife again to cut out an assortment of components from the sheets of rubber that will then be used as the uppers on the boot.
5. Use 100% cotton canvas as a base (known as the skim) to which the rubber is attached. Line the inside of the boot with another layer of canvas that has had rubber forced into the weave (known as the friction) and that becomes an internal reinforcing layer.

6. The boots are assembled by successively layering skim, friction, upper rubber components, the sole and finally the heel onto aluminium lasts.
7. The lasts are removed from the assembly chain and packed on a boot trolley and pushed into a large oven called a vulcaniser. In here the boots are cured by heat and under pressure. After an hour and half at 133°C in the vulcaniser, the boot trolleys are removed and when the aluminium lasts have cooled down the gumboots are pulled off.

And there you have it, your very own pair of gumboots. But don't try this at home. It's a sticky and time consuming process. Rather invest in a pair of Red Band Gumboots – even if you are not a farmer you'll enjoy the feeling of owning a piece of true Kiwiana.

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