

# Xtratuf: Now in China and selling shoddy boots

For decades there has been no footwear more ubiquitous to commercial fishing in the North Pacific than Xtratuf boots.

From San Diego to the Bering Sea, fishermen have relied on their durability, comfort, and support as a consistent tool for the trade. Xtratuf has built a near monopoly with their well-crafted, fully waterproof uppers and slip-resistant soles, giving them a steady, industrial demand. In my short four years commercial fishing, I have never seen anyone wear anything but Xtratufs.

At the start of this year's Southeast Alaska winter season, I picked up a new pair after my old pair succumbed to the grind of near-daily use fishing for salmon and Chinook for a year and a half. I noticed something was a little different: the boots lacked the classic oily residue, and the logo was without the "Made in USA" and red, white, and blue patriotic banner.

At the end of 2011, Honeywell—the giant conglomerate that purchased the Xtratuf brand in 2008—closed its plant in Rock Island, Ill., where Xtratufs have been made since the 1970s, and moved production to an existing Honeywell facility in China. In the process, 250 to 300 people lost their jobs, as David Pauley, mayor of Rock Island, told Alaska's KATV.

Honeywell decided to move production because the Rock Island factory was no longer efficient and could not keep up with production demands, according to an official statement from the company.

Beyond abandoning American workers, the move in and of itself wouldn't necessarily change things. One would assume a neoprene boot triple dipped in rubber would be the same whether produced in the United States or China, but this seems not to be the case.

After about a week, the band that adheres uppers to the sole on one of my boots started to peel; after three weeks, the band began to significantly come off to the point where I could see a two-inch-long gap between the sole and the uppers. The same thing happened to my associate, who had recently purchased a pair. While anecdotal evidence isn't enough to condemn a product as inferior, further investigation shows that Xtratuf's shoddy craftsmanship is widespread.

"The quality went to crap," said Dan Voigt, the manager of Marry Pacific in Ketchikan. "Commercial fishermen are a unique breed. When they go out, they're out for a long time. They need equipment that they know they can depend on, and these don't cut it."

That's quite the statement, especially



Nick Rahaim



An icon of North-Pacific fishing—and once made in America.

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