



Question time

The presenters putting politicians in the hot seat this election



Andy Bell Jonnie Peacock An appier life Voyager's endless journey

ETHICAL LIVING LUCY SIEGLE



Running on empty

THE DILEMMA Who makes the most ethical running kit? **Lizzie, Brighton**

A decade ago the market was wholly dominated by major sports brands and the only race was one to the bottom: an industry predicated entirely upon low-wage production where the supply chain was murky, to say the least.

Major sportswear brands have since raised their game. Notable moves include the 2011 signing of a "historic" agreement on labour rights in Indonesia by Adidas, Nike and Puma. Nike was once the archetypal ethical villain. But after a series of bust-ups with activists and a dip in profits linked to a boycott, the sports giant "learned to view transparency as an asset, not a risk", according to CEO Mark Parker. Many now consider Nike a leader in sustainability.

So are these huge supply chains snaking their way through low-wage economies now green and clean? Of course not. Prepare to compromise when looking for ethical kit. We'll start with trainers. A 2013 MIT study found each pair to be responsible for generating 30lb of carbon emissions. This is substantial. It's due to the fact that each shoe is made up of 65 discrete parts requiring more than 360 steps to assemble.

Saucony is owned by Wolverine Worldwide, in turn known for its US domestic manufacture. Also known

for local manufacture is New Balance, which has a factory in Cumbria. So while the midsoles are usually imported from China, these brands with control over their supply chain and subject to more stringent UK and US laws over production and worker rights get ethical props.

After the shoes, we're looking for athleticwear from a responsible supply chain. The strongest brands I can find are Howies and Yew Clothing. There are also other "soft" ethical brands, including Luta, 50% of whose profits go to Fight for Peace, a charitable organisation that gets young people into martial arts.

If you get your fitness kicks from yoga and pilates, there are tons of ethical options, mostly centred on organic cotton. The quest for a chafe-free run, however, favours synthetic materials. But here's another rub. Running kit is frequently washed and is heavy in plastic-based performance fibres. Mark Browne, from University College Dublin, has monitored the flow of these synthetic fibres from our washing machines to the world's oceans. He found that a single wash can produce 1,900 bits of microplastic. This is an issue we haven't even begun to grapple with yet. ■

Green crush

Faster than the earth can regenerate vital resources, we are using them up. Upcyclists who take discarded objects or materials and make them desirable again through design and reuse are at the forefront of a battle for hearts, minds and hammers. Antonia Edwards, a former nominee for an Observer ethical award, leads the charge. Her new book, *Upcyclist*, is organised by materials – wood, textiles, metal, glass and ceramics, paper and plastic, and mixed media – and shows not only how upcycling slows down consumption but also how it can unlock a whole creative process. Prepare to be inspired.

To order a copy of *Upcyclist* for £23.99, go to bookshop.theguardian.com



Greenspeak

Me-search {mi:-s3:tf} noun

Me-searchers look at manmade chemicals, but rather than question their impact on the biosphere, they want to know the toxic effects on their own bodies. Environmental studies with a close focus

VOTE IN THE 2015 ETHICAL AWARDS

The deadline for entries to this year's awards is 16 March. To nominate yourself or someone you know, go to observer.co.uk/ethicalawards

The Observer
Ethical Awards
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If you have an ethical dilemma, email Lucy at lucy.siegle@observer.co.uk or visit theguardian.com/profile/lucy-siegle to read all her articles in one place