Eyebrows were raised when Pitti first announced that K-Way, the half-century old French sportswear label, had been given one of the salon's prestigious runway slots. But the naysayers turned out to be wrong, after the revamped marque staged a zippy and witty collection in Florence on Wednesday night.
And this first ever debut catwalk show for K-Way turned out to be the latest successful step by the Franco-Italian partnership that is rebuilding K-Way into a happening label once again.

Presented inside Florence’s Rationalist era mini stock market on the banks of the Arno, the collection captured all the optimism of the acid colors windbreakers which first made the brand famous back in the late ’60s.

A techy hunter green duffle coat with zippered hood, paired with sporty shorts, preppy soft-collared top and prim cardigan made for a great opening look. Followed by bold Prince of Wales check coats worn with outlandishly large varsity scarves, or craftily padded puffers in bold blends of spicy orange and banana yellow.

Above all, the K-Way design team injected plenty of wit into the clothes, from space-age all-white hooded nylon cabans, or excellent giant, super-heroine matelassé parkas or enlarged houndstooth check figure-hugging trench coats. All anchored by tough-chic boots, marching to a fantastic French techno soundtrack that included tunes by Corine and Polo & Pan.
“We want to be a leading outerwear brand in the global market. Keeping a fashion angle but being contemporary, sporty and above all timeless,” explained Lorenzo Boglione, vice president of sales.

His father Alessandro Boglione saved K-Way by buying it out of bankruptcy via his firm Basic Net – owner of Kappa, Superga and Sebago - in 2006, before restarting the business in 2009. A decade later, the brand broke the 80-million-euro last year, according to Boglione.

K-Way was founded back in 1965 by Léon-Claude Duhamel. In an oft-quoted incident, Duhamel, while sitting at the Café de Paris in Paris, noticed a lady and her kids dressed in red nylon jerkins and exclaimed, “l’en-cas de” in case of rain. And cas, pronounced KA, became K-Way.

Back in 1992, K-Way dressed the French Olympic team at the Albertville Olympics, however a fire in its main factory subsequently drove the company out of business. Now it seems in very fine fettle.
Where once it was based in northern France, today the headquarters are in Torino. Marc Jacobs, Maje, Petit Bateau, Colette and L'Eclaireur have all partnered with K-Way on capsule collections. Success is principally built on retailing in Western Europe, with strong sales also in Canada thanks to the brand’s French heritage. K-Way now boasts nearly 50 monobrand stores globally and plans to open several stores in Asia – essentially in Japan and Korea.

“The DNA of K-Way is the packable jacket with lots of color. We are all about easy to wear and travel,” argued Boglione junior.

The collection earned a hefty ovation, which had barely ended before Boglione senior jumped on the runway to make a short speech, perhaps more worthy of a provincial wedding, and not quite Pitti. Though he did sportingly introduce the “inventor” or K-Way Duhamel and also the head honcho of Pitti, Raffaele Napoleone. Wisely, neither of them said much other than ‘Grazie.’ The clothes had already spoken for themselves.

By Godfrey Deeny

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