Justin Original Workboots Discovers

It's Hip To Be SQUARE

What customers like for recreational use is what they like for work wear, as well

Johnny D. Boggs

It was two years in the making, but Justin Original Workboots' new square-steel-toe addition to the company's Stampede Collection was worth the wait, brand manager Brandon Barker says.

The boot, which retails for approximately $109 to $120 and is aimed at men ages 17 to 40, combines Western styling and traditional Justin comfort with a sleek toe profile. "The broad square toe is probably the hottest thing going in men's Western profile," Barker says.

Better yet, that steel toe is approved by the American Society for Testing and Materials. Meaning: The toe had to pass the ASTM's compression and drop tests and be electrical-hazard friendly.

In the early 2000s, the broad square toe began gaining in popularity among the equestrian consumer, especially in the core market. In January 2007, Justin Boot Company teamed with the American Quarter Horse Association to launch Justin's AQHA Lifestyle Collection Remuda Series featuring that broad square toe (the company's designated J124 toe).

These days, it's hard not to find somebody wearing a square toe—especially in Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana core areas. And eventually, Barker points out, people want to wear to work what they wear when they go out on the town.

Justin Original Workboots isn't the only company with new steel-square-toe offerings. Rocky and Twisted X, for instance, have their own products this year. Yet Barker is pleased with what his product development team came up with.

"We weren't the first to market with a square [steel] toe," Barker says, "but we wanted it to be by far the best-looking toe profile. Our true identity at Justin is the fact that since 1879 we've produced great, true, Western authentic structure toe profiles."

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Reaction suggests that Justin passed more than just ASTM tests.

"It's going to be a good product for Justin," says Charles Jackson, president of Jacksons Western Store in Asheville, N.C. "It's a good-looking boot and it's a tough-wearing boot, and what sells it is Justin. It's going to be all right."

It took time, however, to make everything right.

"It literally took two years of engineering," Barker says. "We re-engineered the steel toe, came up with a different way to inset the outsole, came up with a brand-new way of developing the steel toe. It really was something we created. It took two years building it, testing it, shaping it, reshaping it.

"Nobody in the industrial work-boot industry really tried to tackle this project because that's not part of their market. We really had to start from scratch and come up

Retailing for approximately $100 to $110, the Stampede Collection work boots provide extended safety and durability with multidensity inserts, enhanced performance storm welts, shock absorbing gel heel pads and slip- and abrasion-resistant outsoles with stylish Western appeal.

with new engineering design technique so that it would pass the ASTM standards. It's a pretty monumental task that we took on."

The boot features multidensity inserts, enhanced performance storm welts, shock absorbing gel heel pads and slip- and abrasion-resistant outsoles.

Shipping began in October, and the boots, Barker says, "have been performing extremely well with our retailers."

Jackson agrees. "It's doing good for us," he says.

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It passes the ASTM standards and it looks great. But how is it comfort-wise?

"We use the same comfort package we use in the Stampede work boots released in round toe," Barker says, "and that has held up extremely well. You do product testing, but you never really know until you put hundreds of thousands of boots on the street and you see how many get returned. Our return rate on Stampede work boots has been extremely low, much lower than normal."

To market the boot, Justin Original Workboots has initiated a "Believe It" campaign that includes displays such as a hang tag shaped like an arrow that hangs from the scallop and points toward the toe. The other side of the tag reads, "Hand them the hang tag."

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That's for workers who are required to show the boots they are wearing are steel-toe. The boot, of course, is also marked "STEEL TOE."

For retailers, the company also has a sticker that can be displayed on the boot's sole that says "ASTM steel toe."

"Our biggest fear was that we got the toe profile so correct and so low that nobody will walk up to this boot in a retail store and actually believe it's a steel-toe boot," Barker says. "They've never seen it quite like this before."

The biggest question might be: How long will the square toe remain in fashion?

"If you had a crystal ball and could tell us that, we'd pay you a lot of money," Barker concedes with a laugh. "We don't know. That's what's interesting about toe profiles. Seven years ago, round toes were the biggest thing. The R-toe wasn't cool anymore. Then about the early to mid-2000s, you kind of started seeing the broad square trend. ... Now, it's everywhere. How long will it last? I don't know. It could be two years from now, but right now it's the hottest thing going in men's."

Justin Original Workboots
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