

# Leading light

**CANDY EVANS** visits lightweight tent manufacturer Terra Nova and finds an encouraging story of UK-based design, development and manufacturing

**TERRA NOVA'S** warehouse, manufacturing plant and headquarters in Derbyshire is an intriguing combination of tradition and leading-edge design.

The walls of its small reception area have pictures showing a selection of tents in use under incredible conditions – one of the least extreme being on Everest – and the company is transferring this experience into the design and manufacture of family tents to take the worst of the British weather. Despite the high-tech approach, the company still cuts and stitches many of its tents in the UK using traditional methods and relies on solid practical testing to make sure the job is well done.

Terra Nova has just been awarded the Guinness World Record for the lightest commercially-available tent for the fourth time. When I visited, Managing Director Andrew Utting had just overseen the weighing of the Laser Ultra 1 for the world record. He says: "Five or six different tents were weighed by Trading Standards under controlled conditions and compared with a standard weight. It's all very technical."

"The tent was weighed in a fully functional form, though we removed the 35g instruction booklet. We're now looking at making the tent even more durable."

The Laser Ultra 1 is officially designated at under 600g thanks to the translucent fabric for the flysheet, which reminds me of a dragonfly's wing. While I was at the factory I had a sneak preview of an even lighter, stronger fabric that's currently under test for the next generation of ultra-lightweight tents.

Terra Nova takes its tent testing seriously. Matt Moore, Head of Sales, was about to use a new ultra-light model during the Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon, a two-day fell running and orienteering race in the Scottish Highlands. The rest of the sales team

also regularly camp in the products they promote, with the company holding an annual event when all the products are pitched in the same area for a week's extra testing.

However, Terra Nova isn't just about excellence in ultra-light kit. It also supplies products for the family market, under the Wild Country brand, and has a range of tents suitable for more traditional backpackers. I was particularly interested in its service for schools and youth organisations. Terra Nova will look after the backpacking tents used by youngsters taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and other similar adventure treks. It takes back the tents over the winter, checking and repairing them as necessary to have them ready for use next season.

This service is one of Sharon Brogdale's responsibilities as Customer Services Manager. I found Sharon inspecting an expedition tent that had been returned for repair. The area where she works is surrounded by documentation and spares relating to all Terra Nova's tents, giving the team access to patterns, fabric and more to repair any product. In some cases, she will suggest a tent is uneconomic to repair, but the owner may be prepared to pay for the premium service because of its sentimental value.

As we were walking towards the door to leave, Matt stopped by a crate containing a pile of dark green fabric and pulled out a handful of tent. It was a sample unit of the latest version of the Wild Country Citadel we had on long-term test during 2010, complete with new fixings for the inner tents, correcting a problem we discovered. It was a potent symbol of a company that takes its customer feedback seriously and I felt quite proud to have played a small part in making a good tent even better.

■ [terra-nova.co.uk](http://terra-nova.co.uk), 01773 833300



The record-breaking Laser Ultra 1



Sharon Brogdale inspects a tent returned for repair



Templates ready for cutting fabric



Dawn Murray stitches another tent



The latest Wild Country Citadel inner tent fixings