



ENGINEERED PRODUCTS



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DECADES OF *Quality* PRODUCTS

A recognized industry leader worldwide, the name Uniroyal Global Engineered Products is synonymous with research and development, innovation and unrivalled quality.

Written by Robert Hoshowsky

For almost one hundred years, the company has built a reputation as the leading manufacturer of cast vinyl coated fabrics through the Naugahyde® brand. The name traces its origins to 1914 and the development of the U.S. Rubber Company plant in Naugatuck, Connecticut, where the name 'Naugahyde' was created from 'Nauga' – as the product was made in Naugatuck – and 'hyde' – because it resembled animal hide.

Naugahyde was the first rubber-based artificial leather product ever manufactured and the first in a long and successful series of product innovations for the company. The company changed its name from U.S. Rubber Company to Uniroyal Engineered Products, and, although the name of the company has changed, Uniroyal's commitment to its customers remains as strong as ever, and Naugahyde continues to prove itself as a superior product used in many industries across the globe.

Naugahyde was created as a durable and cost-effective substitute for leather. It has changed over decades but is still used in many sectors such as automotive, corporate, marine, health care, recreational vehicles, construction and farm equipment.

"In the 1940s and 1950s, Uniroyal attempted to make it a retail brand, with the primary goal of replacing leather in the seating

markets, furniture, as well as fashion and the luggage industries," says company President Howard Curd. "And through that process, they saw the use of it in automobiles and various other things."

Made exclusively in the United States, Naugahyde has been engineered and manufactured to deliver consistent performance across multiple platforms. Unlike fabrics – which stain easily and hold dirt, dust and bacteria – or leathers – which are costly – Naugahyde provides many advantages.

"It is much more cleanable and durable than leather," says Curd. "It holds color better. It doesn't scratch as easily. While leather is a bit more breathable, we've managed to improve the technology so that if now I handed you a leather-grade vinyl and you held it up next to a piece of leather, it would be very difficult for you to tell the difference."

In the automotive industry, in fact, a qualification is that the piece of leather – the visible area – is sewn to Naugahyde, so there is no distinguishing between the two.

"You can see the technology has grown to a point where it really is a substitute for leather in feel, texture and performance; in fact, I would say it outperforms leather."



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Outperforming leather in many areas, the applications and markets for Naugahyde are virtually limitless. Uniroyal Global Engineered Products' Naugahyde® brand offers over five hundred standard products – superior solutions that are longer-lasting and more economical than leather. Naugahyde comes in a range of stunning color and texture options, and – unlike leather and cloth – can be manufactured with qualities and properties to meet exacting customer needs and specifications. Depending on the use, Naugahyde vinyl fabrics can be engineered to resist stains, scratches and even be made to be fire retardant.

Naugahyde has become a premier choice for the hospitality industry. It is used in restaurants, hotels, casinos and cruise ships by clients who respect its quality, styles, texture, durability and superior stain resistance.

While valuable for use in many areas, Naugahyde particularly shines in healthcare environments such as hospitals and medical and dental clinics. Not only attractive to look at and

highly functional, Naugahyde has been engineered to be antibacterial and antifungal. It is easy to clean and resistant to stains from bodily fluids, making it ideal for hospitals and other surroundings where cleanliness is a must.

Moreover, in other sectors such as fitness, Naugahyde is ideal. The comfortable and durable vinyl fabrics are perfect for use in gyms, spas and health clubs.

In addition, the team at Uniroyal can design and create customized fabric solutions using vacuum formable technology. The advantage is that these products can be made without seams or edges where bacteria can grow and multiply.

In sectors such as marine, Naugahyde is used both on ship exterior and interior upholstery, trim and cabin headliners. Naugahyde is found on everything from small boats to massive cruise ships as it withstands water and mildew, which would destroy traditional leather. ►►

- ▶ And in the business world, Naugahyde complements a wide variety of decors and environments with stylish contemporary colors and textures appropriate for all companies.

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As seat coverings in recreational vehicles, construction and farming machinery, snowmobiles, golf carts, motorcycles and ATVs, Naugahyde can withstand plenty of wear and tear and still look great. The product is sold to manufacturers who then sell to major companies like Caterpillar Inc. and John Deere. On equipment for farming and construction, the products are subjected to not only a great deal of wear and abrasion, but direct UV rays, blistering heat and bone-chilling cold. “And all the time, it will hold its color, hold its shape and perform as well. So it is definitely much more durable than leather products,” comments Curd.

In recent years, as more vinyl is being used in automobiles over leather and cheap cloth fabrics, the company is seeing considerable growth. Supplying directly to Tier 1 and Tier 2 suppliers, the company provides Naugahyde to manufacturers who work with giants like Ford, General Motors, Jaguar/Land Rover and Fiat Chrysler. As more customers focus on the style of car interiors, the company says one of its customers, Italian automobile maker Fiat, is leading the way with innovative interior designs, colors and patterns for not only seats, but door bolsters and inserts, armrests, map pockets, head rests, door panels and console covers.

Although the average bolt is thirty to forty yards in length and fifty-nine inches wide, Uniroyal can create Naugahyde for certain automotive and industrial customers sixty-five to sixty-six inches in width. The company maintains highly detailed sales records to keep track of products for customers who request specific colors, grains and fabric, such as IHOP and Applebee’s restaurants.

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Its research and development laboratory is staffed by expert chemist and product development consultants. Approximately seventy percent of the company’s products are created to customer specifications, and it can even match color samples. In recent years, Uniroyal has seen demand for Naugahyde



products that contain unique designs and even metallic prints. “One of our biggest strengths is that we can customize,” says Curd. “They are working with embedded logos and designs. That’s a big part of the business.”

Products are tested every step of the way during manufacturing. From constant color monitoring to viscosity checks, gauge (thickness) and grain depth, Naugahyde is tested for cracking, whitening, its ability to withstand flame and Weather-Ometer checks. It even simulates a person repeatedly getting in and out of a car to ensure the products do not prematurely wear.

“The key is, after it’s produced, then we do testing to make sure it performs in the field, because failure in the field is an expensive thing for everybody,” comments Curd. “We do a whole litany of tests before we let the product out the door.”

The company is continuing to grow and acquired respected UK-based vinyl manufacturer Wardle Storeys in 2013. A few years previously, Wardle Storeys had been a subsidiary of a larger textile company. Recently the European operation has seen double-digit growth and revenue and performed

extremely well. Injecting capital into the company for equipment and technology upgrades has resulted in the speed on one machine increasing by two times.

"Through the acquisition, we are able to get capital to them quicker, and we've seen some tremendous returns on that investment."

"Naugahyde particularly shines in healthcare environments such as hospitals and medical and dental clinics."

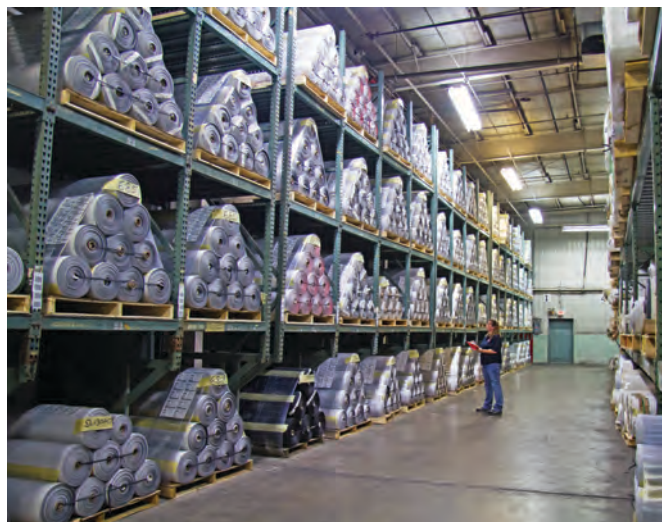
Over the years, the vinyl industry has changed. While it is still used in areas such as fashion and furniture, much of that has relocated overseas. Uniroyal made a conscious decision to focus more on quality than quantity.

"We're competing in only the highest quality end of these markets," says the company's president. "We try to stay out of the commodity-type businesses – like school buses and other areas where it is high-volume/low price – where our offshore

competitors are. All of our products are highly engineered products, and we believe we run the highest quality."

"Approximately seventy percent of the company's products are created to customer specifications, and the team can even match color samples."

Curd sees the company continuing its decades-long tradition of quality as it grows and diversifies its customer base. "I think, ultimately in the next couple of years, we would like to see another acquisition, hopefully some exposure in the Asian market," he says. "Although we are cautiously optimistic about the Asian market, we do see some issues from a macro-economic point of view over there. But we can't deny that it's a growth market in both the automotive and none automotive sectors. They are building a lot of hotels and hospitals and things over in Asia, so it is a focus of ours. And if you asked me in two years, I would like to get another acquisition, hopefully some production capabilities into the Asian market." ■





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