



*The Billy Tannery sneaker is available in three leather colours – chestnut, black and navy.*  
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Set up in 2017 to put to good use goatskins that would otherwise have been wasted, Billy Tannery's latest project is a sneaker made from its vegetable-tanned kid leather.

## Billy Tannery bangs the drum for goat leather

**B**illy Tannery became the first new leather manufacturer to be set up in the UK for a number of years when it was established in 2017. Its founders, Jack Millington and Rory Harker, have a background in marketing and design but have always had an ambition to run their own business. They landed on the idea of launching a specialist goatskin 'microtannery' after learning that a large proportion of the goatskins left over when the animals go for slaughter in the UK are wasted. This is because the processors of goat meat were simply unable to find leather manufacturers willing to work with the skins. With consumption of this meat on the rise in the UK, there is an even larger supply of raw material ripe for being turned into beautiful leather.

The young entrepreneurs saw their opportunity and established Billy Tannery, leaning on the knowledge of experts at the Institute for Creative Leather Technologies (ICLT) at the

nearby University of Northampton. It sources the skins through a partnership with an award-winning goat meat company Cabrito.

A crowdfunding campaign, set up in May last year to secure funds for the initial manufacturing and launch of the first products made from their vegetable-tanned kid leather, received an extremely positive response. It raised nearly £30,000, far exceeding an initial target of £12,000. This has allowed it to create a range of beautiful items, including cardholders, notebooks, briefcases and backpacks. With this experience behind them, the founders again stepped out of their comfort zone with the launch of a sneaker, Billy Tannery's first footwear product.

### Natural qualities

Mr Millington tells *World Leather* that the sneaker project was the result of a "chance meeting" with the owners of Crown



Northampton, a fifth-generation shoemaking company based just 25 miles from its tannery. "We've always thought that our leather would be good for footwear, but we didn't really know how to approach it," he says. After initial discussions about a collaboration, Billy Tannery gave its new partners some of its goat leather so that Crown Northampton could develop a sneaker, the design of which is based on one of its existing models, the Overstone Derby sneaker, with just a few minor adjustments. This model had previously only been made from bovine leather.

Goat leather's natural grain pattern lends itself to use in footwear, according to Mr Millington. Billy Tannery's tanning methods result in a leather that is soft but durable, both useful qualities in a shoe. "We don't do anything in the finish to change the natural grain pattern, so what you get is a subtly different pattern from shoe to shoe," he says, suggesting this adds an element of uniqueness to each pair. "Depending on how you use the product, you will get a different kind of patina on it," he adds, with the grain pattern becoming more pronounced with use.

The Billy Tannery sneaker was unveiled in September and was available to pre-order on the company's website until early October. Customers were able to choose from three leather colours – black, chestnut and navy – and three sole colours. In addition to manufacturing the shoes, Crown Northampton is offering a resoling service if they get worn out or if the owner simply feels like trying a different coloured sole.

Mr Millington says the company was "really happy" with the interest in the sneaker and with the number of orders that were placed. They came mainly from the UK, but there were also customers in the US, which he attributes to coverage in a US sneaker blog. It put no limit on the number of orders, but set a cut-off deadline in order to ensure it stayed on track with the timeline of production. It has learned from past experience that manufacturing is not always straightforward. Customers should receive their shoes in November.

### Room for growth

Billy Tannery's partnership Cabrito inspired the next project on its horizon. Having close links to the food industry, the company thought it would be interesting to look at making products for chefs and other people working within this sector. It will soon begin offering goat leather aprons, which will be made to order at the same workshop where its leathersgoods are currently manufactured. Customers will be able to personalise the aprons with the logo of their restaurant or brand.

Billy Tannery's co-founders are happy with the progress the company has made since its launch some 18 months ago, although Mr Millington admits that it has been a steep learning curve at times as they found their footing in an industry that was completely new to them. "We've had to learn a lot about leather and about manufacturing," he says. He also tells *World Leather* that over the coming months Billy Tannery plans to explore the possibility of taking on external investment as it seeks to expand its business even more. 🌱



*Billy Tannery sources the skins from goat meat specialist Cabrito before processing the material at its 'microtannery'.*

CREDIT: BILLY TANNERY



*It employs vegetable tanning methods and its processes maintain the natural grain pattern of the skins.*

CREDIT: BILLY TANNERY



*Family shoemaking business Crown Northampton manufactures the sneaker at its factory, which is just 25 miles from the tannery.*

CREDIT: ALEX NATT