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SIMULATED LEATHER NOT A HOWLING SUCCESS

Only two years ago, B. F. Goodrich predicted that poromerics would capture 50% of the U. S. shoe uppers market by 1975. Now the company has revised this estimate downward to 25%. An article in the July 26, issue of Chemical Week, "Poromeric heel dragging," explains the reasons. Excerpts from the article follow.

"Ever since Du Pont put Corfam on the market in '63, dozens of chemical companies have experimented with their own versions of leather-replacing poromerics. But only two major producers have emerged as competitors, though a few others are getting ready to enter the field. Most of the contenders simply dropped out.

"Reasons competitors faded: (1) sales of poromerics have not lived up to expectations; (2) there is still essentially one market for them - shoes; and (3) the U. S. shoe industry is being pinched by imports."

In simulating leather none of the poromerics has come close enough to be a complete substitute. There has also been consumer disenchantment with the wearing comfort of some poromeric shoes.

"Imports have been the strong factor slowing the growth of the domestic shoe industry. Shoe imports last year rose to 175.4 million pairs, equal to 27% of U.S. leather and vinyl shoe production. In the first four months of this year imports claimed 35% of U.S. production, a dramatic 30.5% rise over same period last year.

"U.S. sales of Corfam are still substantially greater than sales of all other poromeric materials combined. But two other entries are wielding telling clouts in shoe markets: Aztran, introduced by Goodrich in '67, and Clarino, made by Japan's Kurashiki Rayon Co. and distributed since '67 in the U.S. by Clarino Sales Corp. of America (New York). Clarino is a subsidiary of leather tanner Wolverine World Wide (Rockford, Ill.)."

A string of other producers who began development work on poromeric materials several years ago have stepped out of the field (at least temporarily as far as the U. S. market is concerned). These include General Tire & Rubber, Union Carbide, Georgia-Bonded, Celanese, Courtaulds, and Uniroyal. Two newcomers - Tenneco Chemicals and Occidental Petroleum's Hooker Chemical - are about to try their hand in poromerics.

The whole "tone" of this article indicates that leather will retain a major share of the shoe upper market for many years.