

RONT ROW

Men, Breathe in and Hold It

By ERIC WILSON

Published: July 15, 2009

THE subject of corsets for men — titter, titter — comes up now and again throughout fashion history. They were certainly accepted in the 18th century among the Beau Brummell set, and English tailors advised men to don them again at the beginning of the 20th to flatter their narrow suits.



GIRDLE GUYS The Equmen tank. Can it make an instant hunk?

It may be helpful to keep the past in mind to understand why lately it seems as if underwear designers are taking their inspiration from Mr. Pearl, the corset-maker known for wearing an 18-inch model himself. New styles have arrived in stores this summer as part of a burgeoning category described loosely as “men’s shapewear,” including T-shirts, singlets and briefs designed to help men hold in their gut.

At Saks Fifth Avenue, the hottest new style is an undershirt from an Australian company called Equmen, which purports to improve posture and reduce back pain, in addition to making a man look slimmer. The shirt, which looks roughly like a bicyclist’s jersey, is made of a blend of polyester, nylon and spandex and costs \$89 to \$119, depending on the style and color. Saks has sold more than 30 percent of its stock in four weeks, “which is incredible,” said Eric Jennings, the men’s fashion director.

“No one really knows what to make of it, of course,” he said. “But one of the reasons why men are interested now is that silhouettes in general are getting trimmer.”

Other companies are developing shirts with ergonomic seams, taping inspired by physical therapy equipment and compression panels. Sculptees makes tanks that promise to “slim your waist” and “emphasize your pecs” for \$58. Last month Yummie Tummie introduced a men’s line called Ript Fusion with a classic cotton undershirt (also \$58), which is updated with a polyester and spandex panel that stretches across the belly. It has sold more than 700 shirts online. And yes, Spanx is introducing a men’s version, too.

A personal wear-test of the Equmen and Ript Fusion styles resulted in only minor torso tightening of a half-inch and a quarter-inch, respectively, and a significant effort to get them on. But they don’t look half bad.

“It’s really like a normal T-shirt,” said Heather Thomson, the founder of Yummie Tummie. “You can unrobe in the locker room and not feel like an International Male.”