

FEATURES

DRESS WELL SPECIAL

# Does my tum look big in this?

Elasticated shapewear designed to discipline your wobbly bits is the latest ‘must-have’ for men, finds *Robbie Hodges*

Party season is upon us. And, as man lurches from one festive knees-up to the next, finding time to smuggle a breather between canapés, let alone a quick lunchtime jog, is impossible. Keeping in shape is a challenge.

For an increasing few, the solution is faster than dieting, less testing than a personal trainer and promises instant results. Shapewear, bodywear, control pants: call them what you will, elasticated sheaths designed to discipline your wobbles, normally marketed to women, are now becoming a fixture in many men's wardrobes – or so say the marketers, who are increasingly adopting more creative ways of promoting them.

It took Spanx a decade since its founding in 2000 to release a line for Rubenesque men, thus triggering waves of high street imitations: Marks & Spencer's Bodymax collection soon followed and, at Asos, cummerbund-like waistbands were appended to tightly-whities shortly after. Smaller, niche companies like Zerobodys have been streamlining beer bellies since 2001.

Whether it's an elbow-length zip-through top or a skimpier girdle (some wearers prefer to compound “male girdle”: mirdle), Zerobodys strives to “help men feel great about themselves,” says founder, Shaheen Mirza, who always notes a spike in sales as Christmas edges closer.

His bestseller? “Our incredible

bodies vest” – a finely woven tank top with mercilessly taut focus on the abdomen and serious chest support. “We're most popular among men aged 30-55,” says Mirza, “especially those who have a wedding or big occasion coming up.”

Perhaps you, dear reader, consider yourself above such foppery? Think again. Specialist underwear store Bang-Strike relays that it's not just torsos being tamed, but that the scaffold holding everything together *down there* is subtly changing, too.

Emporio Armani's Magnum brief is one of its bestsellers, offering a concealed jockstrap and a U-shaped variation on the Y-front design akin to a medieval codpiece. The flattering result is such that, subject to consumer demand, Calvin Klein is reportedly releasing a similarly repackaged



Tight fit: Kern with, from left, Atak shorts, Sports Direct Adidas shorts and Zerobodys

SQUEEZING IN: THE TROUBLE WITH SHAPEWEAR

*Kern Roderick-Jones, 52, a digital project manager, put 2018's shapewear to the test*

I can understand why many women moan about squeezing into shapewear, it's an absolute killer. The Zerobody's girdle? Suffocatingly tight. My blokeish proportions became all Kardashian-esque: my waist looked slimmer, my chest fuller and plumped up by the redistributing of my love handles, although, to my dismay, they didn't go away, just merely popped out over the girdle. While this might look suave under black tie, there's a

few important snags: breathing, let alone eating or drinking, is a struggle. Sitting? Forget it. The compression top was more successful. I road-tested it at rugby training. Aesthetically, it skimmed off weight from every angle. Practically, it kept me snug. Would I wear it in the gym? As a middle-aged man with bulges in wrong places, no I wouldn't... I would, however, slip it on under my work shirt occasionally.



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Thin end: Laurel and Hardy are at opposite ends of the male wobbly scale

version of its iconic brief next year. And, as more of us are encouraged to spend an increasing amount of time sculpting “gym bods”, the marketing tactics used to flog sportswear and shapewear have become conflated. “Compression technology” – a phrase first used on Spanx labels – is now on countless athletic brands, which suggest that tightly binding the body during exercise can facilitate muscle growth. Seemingly simple though they are, the underlying vests belie a patchwork of considerably positioned panels, which, according to sportswear brand Atak, at least, are “scientifically proven to increase muscular strength”.

While a 2013 study from the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* suggests compression wear is “effective in enhancing recovery from muscle damage” and can, consequently, bolster hypertrophy, Harri Cizmic, from the University of Bath's Department of Sports Development, believes that the research is inconclusive. “You're improving

## ‘My blokeish love handles and proportions became Kardashian-esque’

blood-flow to certain areas,” Cizmic says, “but it's going to have a very marginal effect.”

Regardless of their efficacy, brands are vacuum-wrapping men the world over. Spanx and Asos may have since wound down their collections, but the growing compression-wear industry – estimated to reach \$6.5 billion by 2024 – looks set to fill the pant-shaped market void, with many men opting to don the garments outside of the gym, too.

“A lot of guys are wearing them under their day-to-day clothes,” says Cizmic, who thinks the flattering definition instantly offered by compression tops is a driving factor in the sector's expansion.

As a flagellant approach to fitness becomes increasingly normalised and brands begin to weave soft sculpture into underwear, it's worth asking to what extent men are prepared to embrace this trend, or not.

After all, the only way to get in shape is hard work and if the party season is about anything, it is about letting loose, not sucking in. Best to eat and drink like a hopeless glutton.

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MAN FRIDAY

THE BEST WINTER COATS

Smart but substantial is key, but they don't have to be safe, says Stephen Doig

lesser-explored variants. The notion of “heritage” can seem painfully twee and countrified, but in the depths of winter, fabrics such as tweed, houndstooth and plaids can come into their own, without looking overly *Monarch of the Glen*.

French menswear brand Ami – a favourite thanks to its mid-to-high-end appeal – has applied checks to coats in clean, minimalist silhouettes, while Mr Porter's own brand Mr P has applied nubbly bouclé – usually a thing of women's jackets and hardy outerwear – to a sleek city-ready coat. Similarly, checks in blown-up proportions can add a contemporary slant to traditional dress.

Another alternative to the standard overcoat is the soft-structure variety, a happy medium between a substantial affair and something more easy and dynamic. Italian house Corneliani is a master of this particular genre: coats with a sloping shoulder and raglan sleeves, belted at the middle robe-like in lieu of buttons; see an Armani-clad Richard Gere in *American Gigolo*. The shape is fluid but it also works particularly well for corporate types thanks to its loose structure, which fits a suit jacket underneath when so many other coat varieties tend to crumple it in ungainly fashion.

And if your fallback stance is something more conservative, instead of standard black or navy, a sleek camel coat is a way to elevate your winter coat without frightening the sartorial horses. It's been a staple in the British wardrobe since Jaeger laid claim to having invented it during the First World War, using camel hair due to shortages of wool. And

Armani elegance: Richard Gere in *American Gigolo*

Checked coat, £379 tedbaker.com	Mr P bouclé overcoat, £675 mrporter.com
Camel coat, £159 zara.com	Albert coat, £795 joseph-fashion.com
Belted wool coat, £225 cosstores.com	Loveless belted coat, £660 farfetch.com
current iterations don't have to look quite as Magic Circle as they tend to; it acts as a happy balance to sporty knitwear track tops for example, or with a light T-shirt in transient weather. The winter coat	should always be sturdy and reliable, but that doesn't mean it has to be a safe affair.

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