

Spanx for the memories



All natural: Declan Cashin without his man vest



Looking good: Declan dons the man vest



Happy customer: Declan with his vest. All pictures by Ronan Lang

Declan Cashin tries out the new man girdle. He'd like to say that he feels like Superman, but confesses that he's closer to a shoulder-padded Joan Collins – and that's even better!

First came package-enhancing underwear; then there was the 'man-bra'; and most recently man-scaras, concealer and 'guyliner' make-up products. Now men's fashion is once again going where only the fairer sex dared go before – this time into the realm of spanx and control underwear. Yes, guys, the male girdle has arrived.

Body-conscious blokes will now be able to keep their expanding bellies and chests under tight wraps with a new "body optimising" sports vest that promises to give the effect of a gym-toned body without having to shed a drop of sweat or incur the pain and achy joints on the treadmill.

Of course, nobody involved with the new undergarment would dare call it a girdle. Instead, it has been given the more testosterone-infused moniker, Core Precision Undershirt, produced by Australian men's underwear brand Equemen.

According to the accompanying promotional material, the vest is comprised of "engineered compression technology" and "helix-mapping structures" that promise to "improve posture, support core muscles, enhance circulation, control body temperature and reinforce form".

Satisfied customers so far include Jamie Bamber, the

beefcake star of *Battlestar Galactica* and *Law and Order: UK*, as well as former England footballer Les Ferdinand, who referred to the shirt as "a pretty miraculous product that makes me feel terrific".

To be fair, though, both Jamie and Les are extraordinarily fit guys to begin with, and indeed every one of the male models on the promotional literature is a wonderfully lithe, muscular, six-pack-sporting god. On them, the vest just looks like a fitted T-shirt, not the male torso equivalent of Bridget Jones' 'control' granny pants.

Clearly, the effects of the 'girdle' vest will vary from man to man depending on his size, so what does it do for the average guy like me?

I'm 27 years old, stand 5'8" and weigh 68kg. I have a 37-inch chest and a waist size of 32. I don't have a wobbly beer belly, but I do seem to have a permanent swollen stomach look that I can't shift.

Chest-wise, I've come to accept that I possess features that fall between 'moobs' and 'pecs' – 'mecs', if you will – and I am eager to see them squashed down.

The vest itself arrives in the post in a clinical, masculine white box. However, I get the shock of my life when I take it out of the packaging.

My housemate is aghast. "It looks like a baby-grow," he stutters.

"There must be some mistake," I say, checking the size on the label (it's small). "There's no way a grown man is supposed to fit into this." But it turns out that I do actually have to squeeze myself into this tiny vest: there's a reason the makers call it a "second skin".

Getting the thing on in the first place proves to be a workout in itself. It's made from polyester, spandex and nylon, so it's designed to stretch – and it's just as well. I get it over my head and soon I'm jumping up and down, making all manner of shapes and noises, as I try to pull it over my shoulders and down over my chest.

Picture trying to wrap an elephant in cling film, or imagine a new-born baby trying to climb back into its mother's womb: that's how difficult and uncomfortable the experience was.

Eventually I get it on. It's so tight that I can see the ends of some chest hair peeking through the seams (the makers advise to buy one size smaller for "maximum results"). I instantly become more aware of my breathing. It's like there's someone sitting on my chest.

That constricted feeling subsides the longer you wear it, however, as it's designed to adapt to the contours of your

particular body shape. And really, who needs a little inhaling and exhaling when you can have a firm stomach instead?

I check for the proto-love handles on my sides. They've definitely been tucked in. I also become more aware of my posture. My shoulders appear broader and my upper arms taut. I'd like to say that I feel like Superman, but the truth is that it's more akin to a shoulder-padded Joan Collins a la *Dynasty*. Why, that's even better!

Once I begin to feel more comfortable in the vest, I get out my tailor tape and start measuring. It doesn't seem to have made a huge difference to my waist size, knocking half an inch off (there are more dramatic testimonials in the press pack from heavier-set men who say the vest cut 3-4 inches off their waists).

It is working wonders on my aforementioned 'mecs', however: they no longer move when prodded, and indeed my

compressed chest is now one inch smaller than before I put the vest on.

My T-shirt suddenly feels looser and baggier once I slip it on. My housemate agrees that I look far more buff. The press release vows that I should feel "instantly sharper and sleeker – ready to conquer". I'm not going to lie to you: I positively strut everywhere that day.

I sit upright in my chair and try to accentuate my arms and chest at every opportunity. I feel about a foot taller. Two separate female colleagues ask me if I've been working out. The self-delusion levels are off the scale.

Eating while wearing the vest is a strange experience. I chew more slowly, taking deeper breaths, aware that my stomach doesn't seem to be getting any bigger, even when I try to push it out. Where's the food going? Will it end up pushed into my lungs? Will that pasta suddenly spew out of my ears?

Later that evening, I assemble some male friends in my apartment to canvas further opinion. After the inevitable slew of Fern Britton-gastric band gags, they all, for the most part, express admiration. "It's the perfect crime," remarks one particularly impressed friend who would do anything to avoid having to toil in a gym. He logs onto his computer straight away

and orders one. Another pal raises a valid point: "But what happens if you wear it out some night and then score? I'd have to sneak into a bathroom and take it off before anything happened. I'd be morto."

Ultimately, that last concern is what it all boils down to. It's utter deception. I eat an Indian takeaway that evening, but I don't seem as bloated as my friends afterwards. However, when I get home and wrestle the vest off, the effect is like that scene in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* where Isla Fisher's roommate opens the closet and all the vacuum-packed clothes explode out. It's as if every one of my internal organs has let out a huge sigh of relief.

The vest may have temporarily improved my confidence in my body, but I never felt more like a fraud. It's no coincidence that I've started going back to the gym and exercising a little more since my experiment.

It was nice to be able to squeeze on a "second skin" for a day to disguise my sloppy ways. But the experience encouraged me to try and achieve the same level of comfort and confidence in my own skin first. Spanx for the lesson, Equemen.

The range of Core Precision Undershirts are available to buy online at www.equemen.com. Prices range from €52-€73.

I SIT UPRIGHT IN MY CHAIR AND I FEEL A FOOT TALLER. SELF DELUSION IS OFF THE SCALE