



Staff photo by Kelly James
Pam Grayson, left, shows off the nautical knicker look for spring. Joy Normand, right, wears a one-piece jumper by Byer of California.

British knickers invade spring fashions for women

The reason for this word is simple. It seems the Brits called women's bloomers knickers. Obviously, because they billowed to the knee like Dutch knee britches.

Unfortunately, as knickers — short for knickerbockers — became shorter and eventually stopped resembling knickers altogether, they retained the name.

In fact, the only thing resembling knickers in present-day Britain is something called plus fours. So called because they are 4 inches longer than knee-length knickerbockers of old, but still carrying that tied-about-the-knee look.

In contrast to their American cousins, the rather outlandish plus four is still considered de rigueur among British gentlemen whether that gentleman be hunting, fishing for salmon or walking some dew-soaked golf course. It keeps wetness off the trouser legs, you see.

Meanwhile, back in the United States, the style was abandoned. More than that, it was chucked out the window by the sissy-dreading American male except for those very pukka chaps you still see trading puns

over golf tees in vintage movies.

Though the style was popular for men and boys of breeding from Dutch colonial times onward — the name is thought to have originated with Diedrich Knickerbocker (Washington Irving's nom de plume) in his 1809 "History of New York" — it had pretty much died out by the late 1920s.

The word itself has managed to live on mainly because it is one of the oldest, and possibly the kindest, name we have for New Yorkers.

However, knickers themselves were as dead as buggy whips.

After a long dormancy they made a feeble comeback during the '60s, this time as women's apparel, but managed to get lost among the T-shirts and miniskirts of the day.

Now they're back for the '80s, and this time around they seem to be outdistancing the reborn miniskirt and at least making a run at the ubiquitous blue jean.

They're now even available in an array of colors, from basic blacks and reds to whites and tartans. And in styles ranging from simple straight lines to refreshingly outlandish lames and multicolored,

billowing Swiss Guardlike shapes.

The fashion industry, obviously aware of the consumer's resistance to fashion tyranny, seems to be making sure that there is a knicker for all tastes including the basic preppie.

And the public is buying them, according to reports from clothing stores.

Knicker manufacturers say they expect the fashion trend to spread from children and teen sizes to junior and misses sizes.

"It's a refreshing change from tight jeans," says one Los Angeles maker, "and women are responding to it."

The new pants do, however, pose a few novel problems. Ending in a gather at the knee, women are suddenly faced with and are already dealing creatively with a bare expanse of shin.

So far, everything from multicolored silk hosiery to textured socks and leg warmers are filling the gap. The sometimes colorful leggings are being accented by nearly every kind of shoe imaginable, from chunky low walking shoes for countrified cords, to high heels, metallic flats and sandals for evening wear.

Popularity grows

Sewing can help the budget

The entertainment budget has been trimmed, chicken and fish have replaced beef on the dinner table and home permanents are the new battle cry.

Still, the budget is tight, and making ends meet is no simple task.

Now where?

If you've been out clothes-shopping lately, you're probably in the right frame of mind to consider this: Start sewing your wardrobe.

Lots of people are, according to statistics. The state of the economy has pushed pattern sales to new highs.

And that's good news for this industry, which has seen fewer and fewer women willing to take the time to sew after joining the work force.

The price tag on a well-made, two-piece suit can run as much as \$200 in many clothing stores — and these are not the designer offerings.

Almost every woman has had to suffer through one or two semesters of beginning sewing classes during the junior high school days.

Some picked up the knack right away, others look back and recall spending more time with a searipper than the sewing machine.

Remember?

If you were one of the lucky ones and didn't find pattern interpretation beyond your calling, then dust off the old machine and get with it.

Perhaps a brush-up course or two wouldn't be a bad idea, either. Many ma-

terial shops offer these courses, and so do sewing machine shops and adult education classes. Some courses are offered at no charge, others for a minimal cost. It's worth investigating.

For those who never caught on the first time, why not give it another try? The high cost of ready-made clothing may offer new inspiration. Again, adult education classes or those offered by stores may be a good bet.

Bonnie Polly offers some tips that have helped her save hundreds of dollars in the more than 25 years since she purchased her first pattern.

"I didn't have a choice, I had to start sewing my own clothes as a teen-

ager," she said.

"I was very tall and very thin, and clothes off the rack didn't fit well and looked even worse."

Polly has one major policy when it comes to sewing her own wardrobe: "Nothing should look like it was made with loving hands at home."

She doesn't see why an outfit made at home shouldn't look even better than anything purchased off the rack.

"Many women have attempted to sew and come away from their first experience with the feeling that they've wasted a lot of time and money sewing something they wouldn't leave the house wearing," she said. "It's not unusual.

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