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WEEKEND



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Christopher Hitchens

One chicken tikka and three Johnnie Walkers



Newspaper of the year

When fit is everything

Although the changeability of denim trends can drive even the most dedicated fashion-follower to distraction, insider retail information suggests that things may actually be more consistent than we think. Last year, a little-known brand called **Tummy Tuck jeans** from a company named Not Your Daughter's Jeans (aka NYDJ) sold 1.4m pairs, the year before that nearly 1m.

Those numbers might not seem very high given that, according to the NPD Group (a tracker of consumer and retail information), there were 450m pairs of jeans sold in 2006 (2007 is still being counted.) But consider this: NYDJ had launched merely a year-and-a-half earlier. And the line accounts for the largest single-day sales of any one item when it arrived at Nordstrom's, the American department store chain.

Why the phenomenon? It turns out women over 35 buy most of those 450m pairs of jeans each year, and the gimmick in the Tummy Tuck jeans is geared to just that generation: a front panel that flattens the wearer's stomach. Made entirely out of denim (so only the wearer knows they've got a quasi-girdle on), the jeans claim to allow women to shrink one, and sometimes even two, sizes.

"Even though I work out, I've never had a flat tummy," says Lisa Rudes-Sandel, founder of the company. "For women who have had kids, that area is very hard to get back in shape. And I didn't want to show my underwear every time I bent over."

It's all about hiding the "love handles that spill over restricting waistlines", says the company. "We're the only people aiming to service baby boomers," says Rudes-Sandel's father, George Rudes, the man behind the 1970s and 1980s fashion-denim powerhouse St Germain jeans. And there are 78m baby boomers.

The plan seems to be working. In

2006, NYDJ reported revenues of \$38m and in 2007 a increase to \$56m.

To put that in perspective, eight-year-old cult favourite Red Engine, a denim company created by former Guess executive James Boldes and one often credited within the industry with inventing premium denim as a category, posted sales in 2006 of about \$10m. Now, Red Engine is aiming at a more crowded market: those changing from skinny jeans to this season's trouser cut, but at least that group continually renews its jeans wardrobe; baby boomers, by contrast, don't yet shop by trend.

And yet, by 2006, Tummy Tuck was in 1,200 specialist shops across the UK, Netherlands, Canada, Scandinavia. In 2007 the line was doing so well, they nearly doubled that number and expanded into Mexico, Spain, Italy, and Germany. Now 2,200 boutiques carry them, and that doesn't even begin to count department stores that stock them such as American retailers Nordstrom and Lord & Taylor; together the grand total is 5,000 doors in 20 countries.

"Perhaps the truth is," says Susan Redstone, author of *Just Try It On*, a new advice book about fashion, and a boomer herself, "that a control top is not sexy. But it is about sales." And sometimes, unsexy sells.

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