

Squeeze in and shape up

The latest in specialty lingerie — shapewear — flattens, flatters and tones at the same time, as **CHEAH UI-HOON** finds out

SINCE bygone days when women wore corsets supported by whalebone, shapewear has come a long way. To the point where it is more than living up to its name — promising not only to bring out that hourglass figure in you, but burning a wee bit of fat and toning up muscle while you're being cinched into shape.

It's not just modular pieces like girdles and waistnippers either, as bodysuits are the next big thing in the power-lingerie section. And then there's thonged-shapewear as well, for those who want to go bare at the back but not forgo control in the front.

Japan's Wacoal is certainly boosting its shapewear range, with a makeover of its lingerie corner at Takashimaya. "The space will be expanded to 700 sq ft and we'll have larger sized fitting rooms put in," says Ishikawa Mitsunaga, managing director of Wacoal Singapore.

This is because the company is bringing in its Perfect Shape shapewear which offers full body control for a price of more than \$200. It will be available exclusively in Takashimaya, says Mr Mitsunaga. Perfect Shape's

key claim is that it will improve one's body shape — thanks to the materials and tailoring of the suit. "Our sales personnel will also be trained to advise on the right fit and type for customers," Mr Mitsunaga says.

Tummy toning

Besides Perfect Shape, Wacoal has also just launched its Tummy Walker (\$87) — that promises to change the way a woman walks so that she increases the use of stomach muscles. Designed under Wacoal's Style Science series, the Tummy Walker follows on the heels of the Hip Walker, launched last year.

While the Hip Walker (\$80, a new range this year will cost from \$60) had an "X" band across the front to hold in the thigh muscles and enable wider strides (thus tauting up the butt), the Tummy Walker features a "Y"-shaped style on the hips. The seamless resin print in the "Y" supposedly compresses the muscles under the hip, pushing the waist forward so that ladies twist their hips more while walking, thus creating a toning effect.

Wacoal goes as far to claim that wearing the Tummy or Hip Walker

five days a week, with 6,000 steps taken a day, could result in a 1-cm loss or more in a month — as tests on Japanese women have shown. "It's almost like going to the gym," says Mr Mitsunaga. If you wear the Walkers conscientiously and take those number of steps a day, that is.

Shapewear is no longer just about keeping you shapely, it's also about keeping you in shape.

Now that is shapewear brand Lumimi's philosophy. Dedicated not only to shaping women, but instilling confidence in them as well, Lumimi's key selling point is its 108 variations of power lingerie to fit women of all shapes and sizes. And then there's the "astronautical" material it's supposed to be made from (for control, breathability and fat burn).

Manufactured in Japan, Lumimi came into the market some 10 years ago through direct selling, and is now planning to have shopfront sales soon. "We've to change our marketing method to go with the times," says Tommy Khoo, Lumimi's marketing consultant.

The company, Beauty Life, is eyeing a prime Orchard Road spot, as it reckons that shapewear is coming back in vogue. "We even have plastic

surgeons who recommend Lumimi to their clients, after they've done liposuction," he notes.

Air stewardesses are also key clients. Most of Lumimi's clients are women in their 30s or above who have had children. Brides-to-be aren't their customer base, "because they're generally very motivated to lose weight anyway", says Mr Khoo.

Having made an art out of the shapewear business, there are 10 consultants who do fittings in clients' homes — and these aren't just your usual consultants, but those who started out wearing Lumimi themselves and still use the shapewear.

The process starts with a potential client filling up a form (one of the items asks you to rate your determination) and then the therapist proceeds to take precise measurements. After which the correctly sized shapewear is brought for you to try.

As consultant Amanda Koo points out, shapewear shouldn't be pinching tight because what you don't want are unsightly bulges oozing out through the seams. "In fact, wearing the wrong underwear is one of the reasons why women lose their ideal shape when they get older," she says, a lady in her 40s with a figure of

someone in her 20s.

The trick to wearing Lumimi is also to manually smooth out the flesh and "shift fats" to the right spots — using your hand to do a sweep from the back, the part under the arms, towards the bosom, for example. The promise is that after one to three months of your first Lumimi shapewear, you'll be back to have the garments taken in a centimetre or so.

A lofty promise, but one that matches the \$800 pricetag for the bodysuit — or \$200-\$300 each for the bra and girdle. Instalment plans are available.

Lacier, racier

Lumimi is also fast on its way to shedding the idea that its shapewear is for the mature women, as it has brought out a less costly basic shapewear line; and also a lacier range — featuring a bodysuit with a G-string, for instance — for the racier set.

Aileen Lane, an image consultant (www.nutri-style.com) points out that shapewear will definitely smooth out the silhouette to give you a more flattering figure, recommending pre-a-porter lines like Marks and Spencers' Magiswear, Flexees (available at

Blush outlets) and Spanx (available at Closet Raid, but only the Power Panties and Higher Power in Bare, from sizes A to E).

Blush will carry the new M Collection Shapewear in October — which is a higher range using better fabrics to give weightless shaping with targeted zones of control, without seams, binding or bulk. What's also popular is the new Flexees Contour Band Collection which has a thong design.

Again, Ms Lane stresses that the key is to get shapewear in the right fit. "Don't attempt to squeeze into a smaller size, you'll just get bulges at the wrong places," she says. (Not always an easy thing, given that brands like Wacoal only has three sizes for its Tummy Walker, for instance. The largest LL size is for those whose waistlines measure 73-79 cms.)

So, if you're already thinking about the evening gowns to wear for the year-end parties, and liposuction is really the last resort, try shapewear. Some things don't change — whether it's the 16th century or the 21st, the hourglass figure is still the ideal shape, and lingerie makers know it.

Lumimi is available at 1 Shenton Way, #01-01. Tel: 6743 5393