

SWIM SUIT STYLES TURN BACK CLOCK

New Line Reverts to 20's— Jantzen Began by Making Trunks for Oarsmen

By JOHN S. TOMPKINS

J. A. Zehntbauer, chairman of Jantzen, Inc., said recently that he was not particularly impressed by his company's 1958 bathing suit line but that he expected sales in the present fiscal year to rise 5 to 6 per cent above the level of those for last year.

Jantzen's new line harks back to the Nineteen Twenties and the styles that the company made when it first entered the bathing suit business. It is thus "old stuff" to Mr. Zehntbauer but new and attractive to the younger generation.

The basic style trend is a return to the close-fitting knitted fabric bathing suit, away from skirted women's models and loosely fitting men's boxer shorts. One man's style, made of knee-length fitted shorts, is very similar to one of the first suits Jantzen ever made.

How It Began

This regression of bathing suit styles put Mr. Zehntbauer in a mood to tell about how the Jantzen company started. It happened in Portland, Ore., in 1909, when Mr. Zehntbauer, with nine years experience selling knitted goods and wholesale dry goods, teamed up with Carl Jantzen a local apple grower. Mr. Zehntbauer borrowed \$5,000 and Mr. Jantzen \$3,500 to buy a knit wear shop they renamed the Portland Knitting Company. That shop, which had a couple of sweater knitting machines in a back room, was the ancestor of the present \$50,000,000-a-year business that has three plants in this country one in Hawaii and licensed manufacturers in sixteen foreign lands.

Mr. Zehntbauer and his partner sold knitted sox, gloves and sweaters and showed their first profit in the third year of operation. In that period, Chinese residents of Portland were leading customers for sweaters and in midwinter would wear two or three, one on top of the other.

A Suit For Rowing

The following year a member of a rowing club came into the store and ordered a pair of trunks made of ribbed wool like the cuffs on a sweater. Later that year the rower returned to order a whole suit of the same material, covering him from neck to ankles. Mr. Zehntbauer said that he and his partner warned the young man that such a suit would be hot and uncomfortable. But he insisted on having it and later reported that it was perfect for rowing and swimming in the cool waters on the Oregon coast.

Mr. Zehntbauer no longer remembers the name of the young man from the rowing club, but admits that he started the company making bathing suits. Portland Knitting bought a special machine that made suits for the rest of the rowing club. Then a sportswear buyer from Meier & Frank, a Portland department store became interested in the knitted suits, and the partners ordered another machine.

New Machinery Designed

Actually, Mr. Zehntbauer says, it was necessary to design new machinery to knit the swimming suits, because nothing exactly like them had ever been made on knitting machines.

For a while the Portland Knitting Company used the letters PK in a circle as its trademark, but during World War I, when the partners decided to advertise nationally, they chose Mr. Jantzen's name as the easiest to pronounce and remember.

They ran four-color advertisements in Vogue and the old Life magazine, and sometimes the ads ate up all the profits. The famous diving girl trademark was invented by a printer to decorate the first Jantzen catalogue. In 1918 the company noticed a sudden heavy demand for its catalogues and traced it to a juvenile fad for pasting the diving girl on the windshields of cars.

10 Million Stickers Sold

The fad grew over the next few years and Jantzen eventually had stickers made for the purpose. They couldn't afford to give them away, but in a three year period 10,000,000 red Jantzen diving girl windshield stickers were sold at cost all over the country. These probably helped the company grow as much as anything, and from a gross of \$250,000 in 1922, Jantzen rose to a \$5,000,000 a year business in 1929.

Jantzen's report for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 1957, will not be out until later in the month, but Mr. Zehntbauer indicates that sales will be at least \$3,000,000 or \$4,000,000 above the \$44,795,392 reported for fiscal 1956.

About one-third of the company's business is bathing suits and the other two-thirds are beachwear. Mr. Zehntbauer argues that it is hard to draw the line between the two, since some beachwear is designed to be worn in the water though it rarely is. Included in beachwear are sweaters, which is Jantzen's second-largest line of merchandise. Shoes, play clothes, foundation garments are made for the company under exclusive contract arrangements with other manufacturers.

The company plans to expand its line of women's sports clothes beyond the beachwear category. Jantzen's chairman says, the company may start making men's slacks and jackets.

About twice as many women's bathing suits as men's have been sold each year for some time, though Jantzen has increased its sales of men's swim suits.