

# Could these shoes save M&S?

by Claire Coleman

**T**HEY'VE been criticised for unveiling plans to cut back on clothing and close stores. But yesterday bosses at Marks & Spencer revealed their new secret weapon: the shoe department.

A 17-piece collection of 'hero' shoes and accessories goes on sale in five stores and online today as a taster of next year's big trends, with the hope that making comfortable shoes sexy will do for footwear what model Rosie Huntington-Whiteley has done for sales of the store's undies.

Jo Jenkins, director of womenswear, said footwear was a 'key priority' and could be sold even in stores where clothes are withdrawn. 'Customers love our footwear and accessories and we see a great opportunity to do more of it,' she added.

So, what can we expect from the new M&S shoes?

Comfort is key in the new collection, and every heeled shoe comes with Insolia technology — a feature endorsed by the UK College of Podiatrists.

This works by using a special insole that slightly changes the angle at which the foot is held, shifting the weight away from the front of the foot and back on to the heel. This reduces pressure on the ball of the foot and corrects posture, thus drawing your stomach in and making you look slimmer.

What's more, it increases stability and makes the shoe more comfortable.

And every piece is designed to fit 'real' women. 'Unlike many retailers, we design all our footwear from scratch,' says footwear buyer Nicola Fletcher.

'All of our shoes start life on a "fit model" — a real woman whose feet conform to a standardised set of measurements,' she says.

Working with a real person rather than a last (a wooden model of a foot, used by many High Street shoe stores), means



The cutwork boot, £35



Patent courts, £29.50



Embroidered trainer, £29.50



Lace-up ballet shoe, £45



Sleek loafer, £59



Aztec heel, £29.50

the model can tell the designer if any part of the shoe pinches.

Ever moaned that you couldn't zip your boots up over your calf? Or that your knee-length boots fit your feet but flapped like wellies around your legs? Disgruntled M&S customers spoke to staff in-store or used a new online feedback process to complain

about this eternal problem, so the team found a solution.

'Issues with boots being too tight or loose on the calf didn't seem to relate to shoe size, so we set our zip manufacturers a challenge of coming up with a zip that could flex laterally,' says Stephen Lawson, who leads the technological side of footwear design at the company. 'Now all of our knee-high boots have stretch-zip technology so they fit comfortably around the calf.'

There's no better test of whether a pair of heels are really comfortable and durable than wearing them all day in the office.

'Many retailers might skimp on the padding under the sole,' says Stephen, 'but we use the same that is supplied to the trainer industry. That means it has a high level of resilience, doesn't compress and will last for the life of the shoe.'

As for smelly feet, they've got that covered, too, as the padding has antibacterial properties.

Even M&S's orthopaedic offering has gone upmarket. You might have once dismissed the store's Footglove range as 'old lady shoes'. But over the years, they've become increasingly fashionable, while retaining their soft uppers and flexible outer soles.

Fashion stores such as Zara and H&M have made a virtue of paying close homage to catwalk trends at affordable prices — but M&S has typically held itself aloof. Until now.

Next spring there will be Isabel Marant-esque studded styles, statement sandals that wouldn't look out of place in Marni and a fabulous pair of Chanel-inspired block heel pumps. The tortoise-shell-heeled black leather ankle boots (£45) are a dead ringer for some Stella McCartney ones now on Net a Porter for £615.

The stiletto-heeled burgundy suede short boots (£39.50) have a very Louboutin feel, and there are Gucci-esque slingback mules (£25) and Miu Miu style strappy stilettos (£49.50).

The company has also said that from now on, its designs will reflect key trends in womenswear. This means a particular colour, such as a certain shade of red, will appear in delicate flashes throughout a collection.

This is something designer brands do as a matter of course — but a significant innovation for M&S.

# Wicke broke

**P**USHING open the door, Jonathan Grindon's eyes scan the bedroom, taking in the single divan with its Chelsea football club duvet cover, teddies and collection of Roald Dahl novels.

A furry toy cat, which makes a 'meowing' noise when Jonathan accidentally knocks it with his elbow, catches him off guard and, instantly, his composure is lost.

For two years, this room in Jonathan's five-bedroom semi-detached house in Surrey has been a shrine to an 11-year-old boy named Timothy — a boy he believed to be his much-loved biological son, having been callously duped by his former wife.

So angry and distraught was Jonathan, a university lecturer, when he discovered her deceit that last year he took her to court, where a judge ordered she pay him £40,000 in compensation for his distress, humiliation and the maintenance he had paid.

A hollow victory when weighed against the agonising loss of a child who Jonathan has, without hope of recourse to the legal system, been prevented from seeing for over two years by his ex.

His anger and agony are palpable. You couldn't imagine it less intense if his child had been abducted or killed. For, in a sense, that is what has happened to Jonathan's son; he no longer exists, in law, biology or as a physical presence in his life.

'There is no greater torment than a child who you have raised and bonded with, fully believing he is your own, suddenly being snatched from your life,' says Jonathan, clutching the toy cat to his chest.

'I was the first person to hold him as my ex-wife had an emergency Caesarean section [under general anaesthetic]. He was the most gorgeous, tiny, perfect little bundle. It was total, instant adoration and love.'

'But knowing that the rights I thought I had to be part of that child's life no longer exist, because they were based on a web of lies, has been like having my heart ripped out.'

'My only hope now is that, remembering all the happy times we had together, he'll will want to rekindle a relationship with me when he's an adult and able to decide for himself.'

And there were, indeed, many joyous times — afternoons eating ice-creams on the beach at Brighton, daytrips to Legoland and countless bedtimes spent reading Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland* — mementoes and photographs from which are everywhere in the beautiful home Jonathan shares with his third wife.

Theirs is not a simple story of betrayal, however. To protect the boy's identity, we cannot reveal his real name, nor those of his 'parents'.

**T**HE whole sorry saga began in early 2005 when Jonathan, then in his early 50s, and his then wife, Annette, agreed, after two years of marriage, that they wanted to have a child together.

His wife was 43, however, and tests revealed her eggs were past their best. Their only hope was a donor.

To complicate matters further, Jonathan had undergone a vasectomy when his two children from his first marriage, now in their 20s, were young; his sperm would have to be extracted from his testicles and inseminated directly into the donor's eggs.

With IVF being their only way forward, the couple settled on a Spanish fertility clinic, with eggs from a local woman, in a procedure costing £7,000.

According to Jonathan, their marriage was already under strain, a fact he blames partly on the long hours his highly-driven ex devoted to her business, so he suggested that they see a relationship counsellor before adding a baby to the mix.

His wife, he says, lasted four sessions

by Helen Carroll

before dropping out, after which he continued seeing the therapist alone. In the meantime, they agreed to try for a baby.

Having already deposited a sperm sample on an earlier visit to Spain, Jonathan's presence was not required at the follow-up appointments in January 2005, at which point the donated eggs were to be fertilised and transferred to his wife's womb.

Annette declared, in no uncertain terms, that she would prefer to travel to Spain alone. She wasn't alone, however. For reasons known only to her, she decided to take an ex-boyfriend along for the trip and at the 11th hour used his sperm, not Jonathan's, to fertilise the donor eggs.

Completely ignorant of the deception, Jonathan was overjoyed when Annette revealed she was pregnant, and their son, Timothy, was born the following October.

He remembers filling with pride when people, including his own mother, commented on how much Timothy looked like him.

The couple's happiness was not to last. The existing cracks in their already fractious marriage opened further, and for 18 months they managed to co-exist, bitterly, under the same roof for their son's sake.

It was during one of Annette's regular trips abroad that Jonathan decided he'd had enough.

'She rang home and, while I stood with the baby in one arm and the phone in my other hand, she shouted and screamed at me, saying she'd forgotten something important and demanded I check her home office to see if it was there,' recalls Jonathan.

'This was the final straw: there was so much animosity between us. With hindsight I suspect the stress she felt, keeping this huge secret, was largely responsible.'

'When she returned home I told her I was leaving. She didn't try to talk me out of it. She seemed relieved, in fact.'

'We agreed our son's time would be divided between my new home and hers.'

So he moved out when their boy was 18 months old. As the 'responsible father' he was, he agreed to pay £10,000 a year in child support, and continue to see his son regularly.

Financially solvent in her own right, rather than sell the family home, worth around £1 million, and divide