Get tanked

by LESIA MANCHULENKO **For Southam Newspapers**

OTTAWA - Paired with a luminescent tulle skirt, a tank top can whisk you to a midnight gala. With a pair of cut-offs and a maple leaf tattoo, it can take you into the heart of the festivities on Canada Day. But don't misunderstand this perennial wardrobe staple. A tank top is not just a tank top. Finding the perfect one for an occasion can be a complex challenge.

There was a time when the tank was simply an accessory - to be worn demurely under something more . . . well, just more.

But skin is in and the tank has surfaced as a fashion force unto itself. Tanks are more popular than T-shirts this summer and they're popping up with lacy edges, appliqud straps and silk-screened fronts a la Charlie's Angels; in cotton knits and racy leathers.

"They're everywhere," says Lucie Seguin, manager of an Au Coton store in Ottawa. "I think women want to wear them more than they used to. There's more of a 'go for it' mentality. Even bigger women will wear them."

But there are factors to consider when choosing the tank that's right for you - from fabric to style.

Au Coton carries at least seven varieties, each of which comes with its own list of pros and cons. All of their tanks are at least 98 per cent cotton, which can be good or bad depending on your outlook.

Cotton is more comfortable and breathes better than synthetics, but it doesn't have the same elasticity and

Eventually, with washing, any pure cotton tank is doomed to become one of those amorphous blobs - suitable for cleaning a barbecue, but not attending

"Anything with Lycra in a tank top is really important," says Chantal Biro-Schad, co-owner of Ottawa's two Schad stores.

"You don't wear loose tank tops any-

The rule of thumb seems to be the higher the Lycra content, the dressier the top. At Schad, which carries an eclectic selection of tanks, this relationship is reflected in the price - from a paisley polyester kerchief tank by Imitz for \$70 to a kitten-soft cotton knit by Good and Beder for only \$35.

And what to do about the eternal bra

Jean maker puts on push to look hipper

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Levi Strauss and Co. is blending youthful narcissism with a fashion throwback from the 1970s as it launches a marketing push to become hip again.

The embattled jeans company's new ad campaign — called Make Them Your Own — began this week with a 52-page Vogue magazine supplement that features young people checking themselves out in their Levi's jeans.

In a few months, Levi's will launch its first major advertising campaign in nearly 20 years for its classic corduroy line of pants. The company is re-emphasizing cords as the 1970s fashion statements become stylish again.

Before the cords campaign begins Nov. 6, Levi's will focus on the sex appeal of its various jean styles.

The company will start its television blitz with a commercial featuring young men and women flirting with each other as they dance in front of dressing room mirrors.

The commercial, made by Oscarnominated movie director Spike Jonze, is scheduled to debut Aug. 14 on MTV and other cable networks popular among the core target audience consumers between the ages 18 and

San Francisco-based Levi's has fallen out of favour with young adults and adolescents who have flocked to other brands, such as the Gap and Tommy Hilfiger, which are considered more

The exodus has hurt Levi's badly. The company's 1999 sales fell 28 per cent to \$5.1 billion US from \$7.1 billion in 1996.

En route to a scant \$5 million profit in 1999, Levi's hired marketing sharpshooter Phil Marineau from Pepsi last fall to become the company's chief executive. He replaced Robert Haas, a member of the family that owns Levi's.

As Marineau focuses on younger consumers, Levi's executives are confident the message underlying its new ad campaign won't alienate the older baby boomers that still represent a major market for the company.

With the new campaign, "the Levi's brand communicates what consumers have always felt about their Levi's jeans — that they are the perfect foundation for displaying one's unique style," said Sean Dee, the company's brand marketing director.

problem? Tank top practicality has made exposed bra-straps acceptable, but some women just haven't warmed to the idea. And even the most carefully designed tanks with the widest straps can still slip and slither just enough to keep you constantly

Solutions to the problem can range from safety pins to layering; from going strapless to (if you can get away with it) going braless.

But one of Biro-Schad's favourites is the new line of tube bras by Vie available at the Bay for about \$20.

"They hold better than a strapless and they come in all sorts of beautiful colours so it doesn't matter if they show," she says.
As for body type, both Biro-

Schad and Seguin agree that, in general, women with large breasts should shy away from itsy-bitsy camisole tops and go for something with a wider strap and a bit more support.

And women who are self-conscious about their arms should look for something with a cut-in shoulder. "Everyone has nice shoulders," savs Biro-Schad.

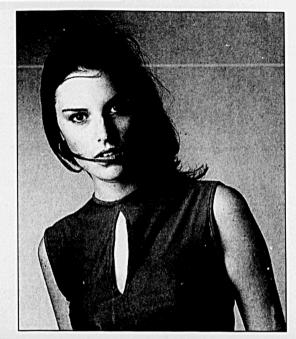
For now, the word in the fashion world seems to be that with more and more styles emerging, there's a tank out there for everyone.

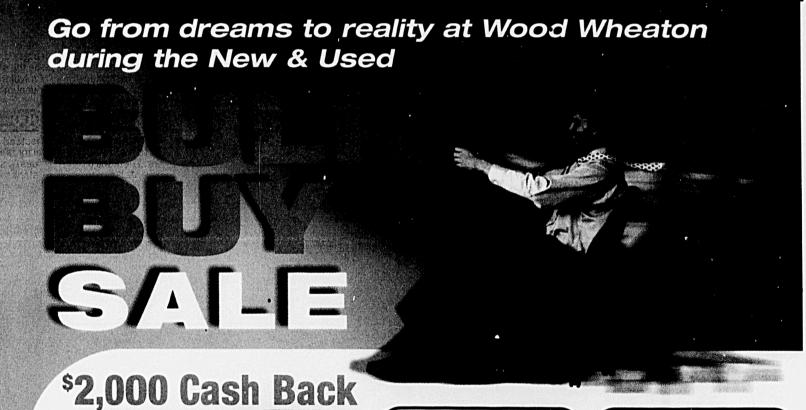
"I would never wear a tank before because I thought I was too skinny, but now I just go for it," says Seguin.



Southam photos Cotton and lycra tank with iridescent sequins, left, and lycra tank, below, with opening in front gives style to these tops.

Open shoulders, cut-out photo, make this tank attractive to women who want to draw attention away from their arms.





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