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Fashion aims to catch up with street thieves

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A NEW weapon in the war on crime was unveiled to the travelling public yesterday – a money belt disguised as a piece of lingerie.

The belt is part of an eye-catching new range of bags and accessories designed specifically to combat street theft. Other items include wrist bands to carry mobile phones, alarmed laptop cases and high-security record bags for DJs.

The range has been developed by students at Central St Martin's College of Art and Design – where leading designers Stella McCartney and John Galliano studied – to address the four most common types of crime on public transport, which are:



TIGHT SECURITY: A money belt disguised as lingerie, and a rucksack

- ◆ Lifting, taking an item lying around
- ◆ Slash, where bagstraps are cut;
- ◆ Grabbing...

The lingerie "stealth belt", made from a cotton Lycra, keeps valuables separate from a handbag and is invisible to would-be thieves.

Other products include the "phone safe", a wrist-hugging mobile phone holder which, from a distance, looks much like a sweatband. It allows wearers to make calls just by lifting their wrist to their ear and is made of a stretchable gauze fabric.

The range also includes half-a-dozen bags and rucksacks which include features like rolling Velcro tops and stretch hoods to stop thieves gaining access.

Some also have tough inserted layers to make them slash-proof and extendable wire clips and steel coils with combination locks so they can be secured to furniture in pubs.

A computer laptop bag can be carried across the owner's front – if an attacker pulls the bag hard the strap detaches and triggers a 138-decibel alarm.

Research for the range was also carried out by British Transport Police and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the charity named after the missing estate agent and headed by her mother Diana, which works along-

side the Government, police, educational establishments, public bodies and the business sector to encourage personal safety.

While most people tend to leave handbags and jackets open to pass-

by by wrapping them over the backs of chairs, a new type of chair has been designed to help prevent theft.

The chair, in which bags can be suspended from the seat and their straps sat on, have been tested in London by restaurant chain Pizza Express International.

central Saint Martin's College, with help from the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, has also been working to make furniture more secure by design.

Elizabeth Lyell, spokeswoman for the trust said yesterday, "It's difficult to get young people to take real steps to improve public safety, so it's great to have safety products like these designed by young people for young people."

"Diana Lamplugh has been really enthusiastic about the project from the start and has regularly been in to St Martin's to talk to the students involved in it."

Ms Lyell said plenty of interest had already been shown in the range, including inquiries from as far afield as Scandinavia and Japan.

Scotland Yard Commissioner Sir John Stevens welcomed the initiative, saying it could only help in the fight against crime.

He added, "There are also many steps that people travelling into London can take, to make themselves and their belongings safer and pro-

tect against opportunistic thieves."

The accessories, which will go on sale at Selfridges in London and Fonehouse stores throughout the UK, were demonstrated to commuters in London yesterday.

Passers-by at Victoria station were also asked to sign petitions calling for manufacturers to incorporate anti-theft measures into their products.

Dr Lorraine Gamman, project director of the Design Against Crime Research Initiative at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, said, "We want manufacturers to design crime out of products but unfortunately, crime pays for some manufacturers."

"There is a problem getting manufacturers to take crime on board. They say it's not the responsibility of the designers, it's the responsibility of the police, but we don't agree with that."

A recent survey of 50 top-selling bags found only one that had been designed with in-built security (Source: Independent 2001).