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(54) **Item of underwear**

(57) An item of underwear which, unusually, is capable of combining several functions into a single garment, comprises a first portion (2) formed in the shape of knickers and a second portion (3) which extends seamlessly from an upper part of the first portion (2) to a delimiting edge (5) of said garment, the first and second portions having a degree of elasticity such that the

delimiting edge of the garment can reach at least as far as the wearer's bust at the top. Fastening means (10) are also provided for attachment to accessories such as, for example, a single shoulder strap (7), two shoulder straps (7), a bra (8) or straps (9) which act as suspenders. The fastening means (10) are positioned close to the delimiting edge (5) of the garment.

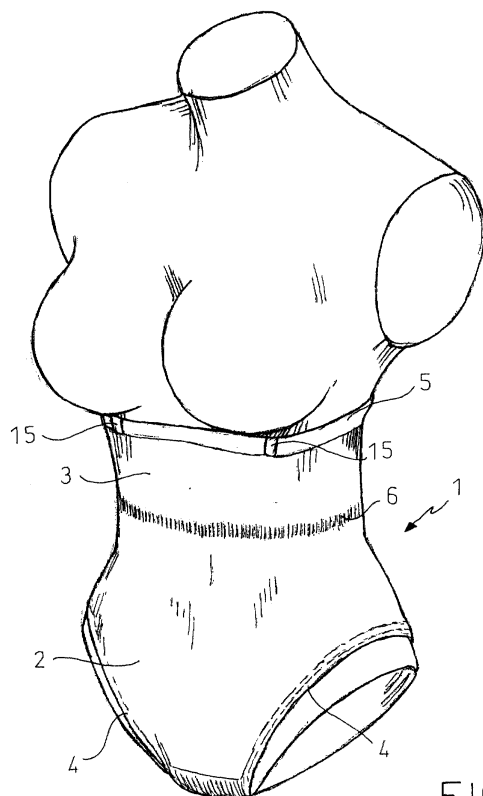


FIG. 1

Description

[0001] The subject of the present invention is an item of underwear.

[0002] More specifically the present invention relates to an item of ladies' underwear.

[0003] As is known, various different types of underwear are available such as, for example, knickers, bras, bodies or suspender belts. Each of these performs a specific function and, to that end, usually takes on a specific form.

[0004] Thus a woman has to purchase various items of underwear, each of which is designed to satisfy one of the specific functions mentioned above.

[0005] Clearly, known items of underwear have certain disadvantages such as, for example, the fact that they can be used only for the specific functions for which they have always been used.

[0006] Within the underwear sector there is also an acutely felt need to produce garments using extremely simple production methods which, furthermore, give garments that are also easy to wear.

[0007] The problem forming the basis of the present invention is one of devising and making available an item of underwear whose structural and functional characteristics are such as to satisfy the abovementioned requirements while at the same time overcoming the abovementioned drawbacks found in the prior art.

[0008] This problem is solved by an item of underwear of the type specified above, comprising a first portion formed in the shape of knickers, a second portion which extends seamlessly from an upper part of the first portion to a delimiting edge of said item, and fastening means for attachment to accessories which modify the configuration and use of the item, the first and second portions having a degree of elasticity such that the delimiting edge of the item can reach at least as far as the wearer's bust at the top.

[0009] Further characteristics and the advantages of the item of underwear according to the invention will become apparent from the following description of a preferred embodiment thereof which is given by way of non-limiting example with reference to the appended figures, in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a perspective view of an item of underwear according to the present invention, in a first use configuration, in which a second portion covers the chest of the wearer;

Figure 2 illustrates a perspective view of the garment of Figure 1 in a second use configuration, in which a delimiting edge reaches above the wearer's bust;

Figure 3 illustrates a perspective view of the garment of Figure 1 in a third use configuration, in which two shoulder straps have been provided to support the garment;

Figure 4 illustrates a perspective view of the garment of Figure 3 in a fourth use configuration, in which a single shoulder strap has been provided which passes around the wearer's neck;

Figure 5 illustrates a perspective view of the garment of Figure 3 in a fifth use configuration, in which the delimiting edge of the garment has been fastened onto the shoulder straps of a bra;

Figure 6 illustrates a perspective view of the garment of Figure 1 in a sixth use configuration, in which the second portion has been folded down onto the first;

Figure 7 illustrates a perspective view of the garment of Figure 6 in a seventh use configuration as a suspender belt; and

Figure 8 illustrates an enlarged detail of Figure 3 in which the fastening between the garment and the associated shoulder strap can be clearly seen.

[0010] With reference to the above figures, the numeral 1 denotes an item of underwear, or a garment, as a whole which is made up of a first portion 2 formed in the shape of knickers and a second portion 3 which extends seamlessly from an upper part of the first portion 2.

[0011] The first portion 2 has a conventional knicker structure which consists of a front part and a rear part which are joined together at the bottom to form the so-called crotch. The join between the front part and the rear part is usually formed by means of a seam, which has not been shown. Conventional holes 4 for the legs are made in the sides of the second portion and extend from the crotch to an intermediate zone of the knickers.

[0012] The second portion 3 is in the form of a band which, when the garment is being worn, covers the wearer's trunk, extending up to a delimiting edge 5 of the said garment.

[0013] The garment 1 is preferably made from a tube which seamlessly forms both the first and the second portions. This tube has shaped cuts which define the leg holes 4 of the knickers and are made close to the lower end of the first portion.

[0014] If the garment 1 is made from a tube, both the first and second portions have no side seams. There is, however, a transverse seam which delimits the lower part of the knickers at crotch level and joins the front part to the rear part.

[0015] In accordance with the illustrations of Figures 1 and 6, the garment 1 consisting of a first portion 2 and a second portion 3 enables two first use configurations to be achieved. In the configuration shown in Figure 1, the second portion covers the chest of the wearer while the delimiting edge 5 reaches underneath the bust.

[0016] In the configuration shown in Figure 6, the second portion 3 is folded down onto the first portion 2 with the fold line lying around the waistline. This option gives "control" type knickers whose support effect is due to the double layer formed by the knickers themselves and by the second portion which covers and holds in the

waistline and tummy.

[0017] The first and second portions have a degree of elasticity such that the delimiting edge 5 of the garment can reach at least as far as the wearer's bust at the top. This configuration is for example illustrated in Figure 2, in which the garment 1 thus takes the form of a strapless body.

[0018] A band 6 having a different degree of elasticity can advantageously be provided between the first and second portions, along the upper part of the knickers. In the configuration of Figure 1, for example, the band 6 lies around the waistline of the wearer.

[0019] More specifically, this band can be less elastic than the rest of the garment and separates the first portion 2 - in other words the knickers proper - from the second portion 3, thereby enabling a closer fit around the body.

[0020] In addition to the configurations described above, the item of underwear 1 also allows other configurations to be produced, as illustrated for example in Figures 3, 4, 5 and 7.

[0021] Figures 3 to 5 correspond to a body type configuration with shoulder straps 7. In Figure 3 in particular, two shoulder straps 7 are provided which fasten, both at the front and at the back, onto the delimiting edge 5 of the second portion 3 and lie astride the wearer's shoulders.

[0022] Figure 4 illustrates a configuration having a single shoulder strap 7, the ends of which fasten at the front onto the delimiting edge 5 of the second portion 3. The single shoulder strap passes around the wearer's neck.

[0023] Lastly, in Figure 5, the garment 1 is combined with a bra 8 of conventional type and makes use of the shoulder straps 8a on the latter to support itself above the bust.

[0024] A further configuration is illustrated in Figure 7 in which the second portion 3 is folded down onto the first portion 2. In addition, suspender straps 9 for supporting stockings are fastened to the delimiting edge 5 of the second portion 3 so that the garment 1 assumes the form of a suspender belt.

[0025] In order to produce the configurations illustrated, in addition to the elastic properties described above, the item of underwear which forms the subject of the present invention, and in particular the second portion 3, comprises fastening means 10 for attachment to the shoulder or suspender straps so as to make said garment extremely versatile and allow different configurations and uses.

[0026] The suspender straps 9 illustrated in Figure 7, or the shoulder straps 7 or 8a illustrated in Figures 3 to 5, constitute accessories which modify the configuration and use of the garment 1.

[0027] These accessories allow the garment to be supported correctly when being worn or to be fastened onto other garments such as stockings or bras.

[0028] In all the cases described above, at least one

end of the accessories is fastened to the second portion close to the delimiting edge, where the fastening means are preferably positioned.

[0029] These fastening means are advantageously formed by fasteners 11 inserted between the garment 1 and the accessories. These fasteners can have one end which is fixed to the garment and be attached in a removable manner to the accessories, or vice versa - i.e. one end can be fixed to the accessories and they can fasten in a removable manner onto the garment, close to the delimiting edge 5.

[0030] Figure 8 illustrates in detail a possible embodiment of the fastening means 10 for use on a body with one or two shoulder straps. The fastening system illustrated is identical for suspender straps 9, in which case Figure 8 simply needs to be rotated through 180° on account of the upturned position of the second portion 3 which is folded down onto the first portion 2.

[0031] Each fastener is preferably in the form of a double fastener which can be attached in a removable manner either to the garment or to the accessories, as illustrated in Figure 8.

[0032] To this end each fastener 11 comprises a first portion 11a and a second portion 11b which are preferably symmetrical about a central point of the fastener.

[0033] The first portion 11a comprises a first slit 12a having an access opening on one side of the fastener and two hooks 13a parallel to said slit. The second portion 11b comprises a second slit 12b and two hooks 13b parallel to the second slit 12b. The second slit 12b preferably has an access opening on the opposite side of the fastener to that of the first slit 12a.

[0034] The fastener 12 therefore essentially has an "S" shape in which the upper and lower sides comprise the hooks 13a and 13b which delimit an opening giving access to a space 14 parallel to the corresponding slits 12a, 12b.

[0035] The fastening means 10 also comprise loops 15 attached to the second portion 3 of the garment 1, in particular attached close to the delimiting edge 5. Four loops are preferably attached: two at the front and two at the back, so as to be able to offer all the configurations described above.

[0036] Each loop 15 is made using a strap 16 folded back on itself and partly stitched onto the second portion 3. In the examples illustrated the strap is positioned astride the delimiting edge 5. Preferably, the loops 15 do not project beyond the garment and remain essentially within the delimiting edge.

[0037] The first slit 12a of the fastener is thus inserted in a removable manner into a loop 15 while the corresponding hooks 13a grasp the strap 16 so as to prevent the fastener from slipping off.

[0038] In this way the fastener is fixed to the garment while its second portion 11b projects slightly from the delimiting edge 5.

[0039] The associated accessories - the shoulder straps 7 or suspender straps 9 - are preferably made

from elastic straps in which at least one end is folded back and preferably partly stitched down forming a loop 7a, which is illustrated in Figure 8 only with respect to the shoulder straps but is similar for the suspender straps 9.

[0040] The second portion 11b of the fastener is then attached in a removable manner to the relevant accessory by inserting the second slit 12b into the loop 7a formed at one end of the shoulder straps or relevant accessories.

[0041] In the case of shoulder straps, both ends are shaped such that they can fasten onto the second portion 11b of the fastener, while in the case of suspender belts, one end fastens onto the garment while the other end supports the top of the stocking.

[0042] The shoulder straps in particular can be made such that their length can be varied. To this end, one end of the shoulder strap is attached to said strap so that it is able to slide. Consequently one end of the shoulder strap is loop-shaped while the other end is stitched to form the loop 7a.

[0043] When fixing the fastener 11 to the corresponding accessories, the hooks 13a and 13b grasp the shoulder strap 7 or the suspender straps 9, thereby preventing the fastener from slipping off.

[0044] As may be appreciated from the above description, the garment according to the present invention fulfils the requirement of combining several configurations into a single garment, thereby making it extremely versatile and adaptable to different needs and uses.

[0045] Depending on the configuration adopted and on the use for which it is intended, the abovementioned garment can be used as knickers or briefs having different configurations and degrees of control, as a body - with or without straps - or as a suspender belt.

[0046] An additional advantage of the item of underwear according to the invention lies in its unusually simple structure which enables it to be produced at a very low cost, especially compared to other types of garments.

[0047] A further advantage of the present invention is that of being able to use accessory elements which finish off the various configurations.

[0048] Such accessories are preferably fastened onto the garment without any rigid parts or fasteners that are permanently fixed to the garment and which can cause discomfort while the garment is being worn or can damage it during washing.

[0049] The present invention therefore makes it possible to satisfy the abovementioned requirements of ease of manufacture and simplicity of structure. This is also true during use, since the various configurations can be obtained simply and quickly.

[0050] It is clear that variations and/or additions may be made to the embodiments described above and illustrated.

[0051] A person skilled in the art may, in order to satisfy contingent and specific requirements, make numer-

ous modifications and adaptations to the preferred embodiment of the garment described above and may substitute certain elements with other, functionally equivalent, ones without thereby departing from the scope of the following claims.

[0052] For example, the loops 15 may be removably mounted on the garment 1 or may be fixed to it by means of stitching, thus forming a decorative part of the garment itself.

Claims

1. Item of underwear (1) comprising:

a first portion (2) formed in the shape of knickers and a second portion (3) which extends seamlessly from an upper part of the first portion (2) to a delimiting edge (5) of said item, the first and second portions having a degree of elasticity such that the delimiting edge of the item can reach at least as far as the wearer's bust at the top, and fastening means (10) for attachment to accessories (7, 8, 9) which modify the configuration and use of the item (1).

2. Item of underwear according to Claim 1, in which the fastening means (10) are positioned close to the delimiting edge (5) of the item.

3. Item of underwear according to Claim 2, in which the fastening means comprise at least one loop (15) attached to the second portion (3) and to which said accessories (7, 8, 9) are fastened.

4. Item of underwear according to one of the previous claims, in which the fastening means (10) comprise at least one fastener (11) which can be fixed to the second portion (3) of the item (1) and to the accessories.

5. Item of underwear according to Claims 3 and 4, in which said fastener (11) comprises a first portion (11a) and a second portion (11b), said first portion (11a) being inserted in a removable manner into said loop (15) and said second portion (11b) being fixed to said accessories (7, 8, 9).

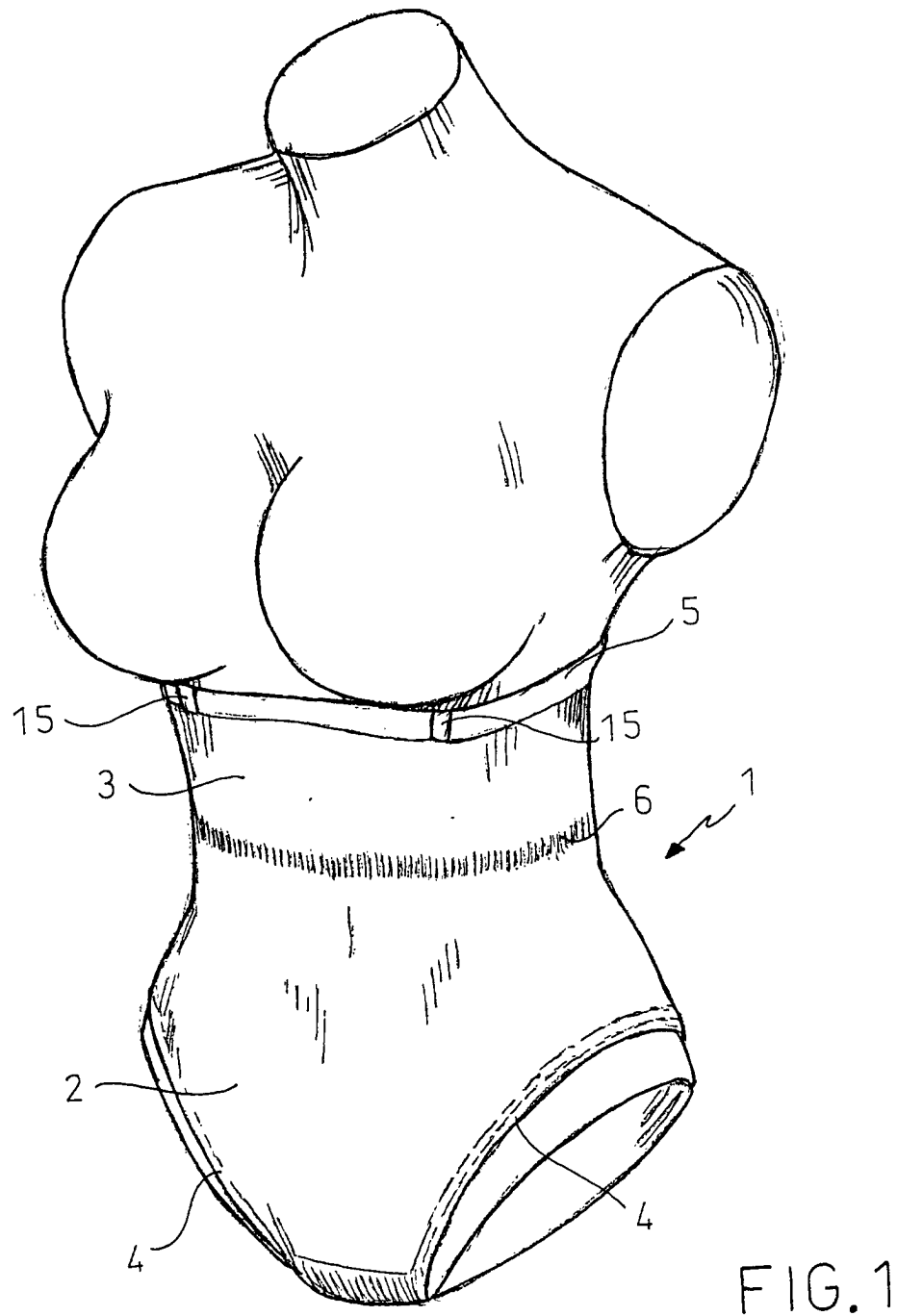
6. Item of underwear according to Claim 5, in which said first portion (11a) of the fastener (11) comprises a first slit (12a) which is inserted into said loop (15), and at least one hook (13a) which prevents the fastener from slipping off.

7. Item of underwear according to Claim 6, in which said second portion (11b) of the fastener (11) comprises a second slit (12b) and at least one hook

(13b) which prevents the fastener (11) from slipping off the associated accessory (7, 8, 9).

8. Item of underwear according to Claim 4, in which said fastener (11) is securely fixed to the ends of the associated accessories (7, 9). 5
9. Item of underwear according to one of the previous claims, in which said accessories comprise at least one shoulder strap (7), the ends of which fasten at the front onto the delimiting edge (5) of the item, said shoulder strap (7) passing around the wearer's neck. 10
10. Item of underwear according to Claims 7 and 9, in which the shoulder strap (7) comprises a loop (7a) at each end into which the second slit (12b) of the fastener (11) is inserted. 15
11. Item of underwear according to one of Claims 1 to 8, in which the accessories comprise two shoulder straps, each of which has ends which fasten onto the front and back of the delimiting edge (5) respectively. 20
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12. Item of underwear according to Claim 11, in which the accessories comprise the shoulder straps (8a) of a bra (8).
13. Item of underwear according to one of Claims 1 to 8, in which the accessories comprise straps (9) which act as suspenders and have one end which fastens onto the delimiting edge (5) when the second portion (3) is folded down onto the first portion (2). 30
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14. Item of underwear according to Claims 7 and 13, in which said straps (9) comprise a loop-shaped end into which the second slit (12b) of the fastener (11) is inserted. 40
15. Item of underwear according to one or more of the previous claims, in which the item (1) comprises at least one band (6) positioned between the first and second portions (2, 3), said band having a different degree of elasticity to that of the rest of the item (1). 45
16. Item of underwear according to Claim 15, in which said band (6) is less elastic than the first portion (2) and the second portion (3). 50

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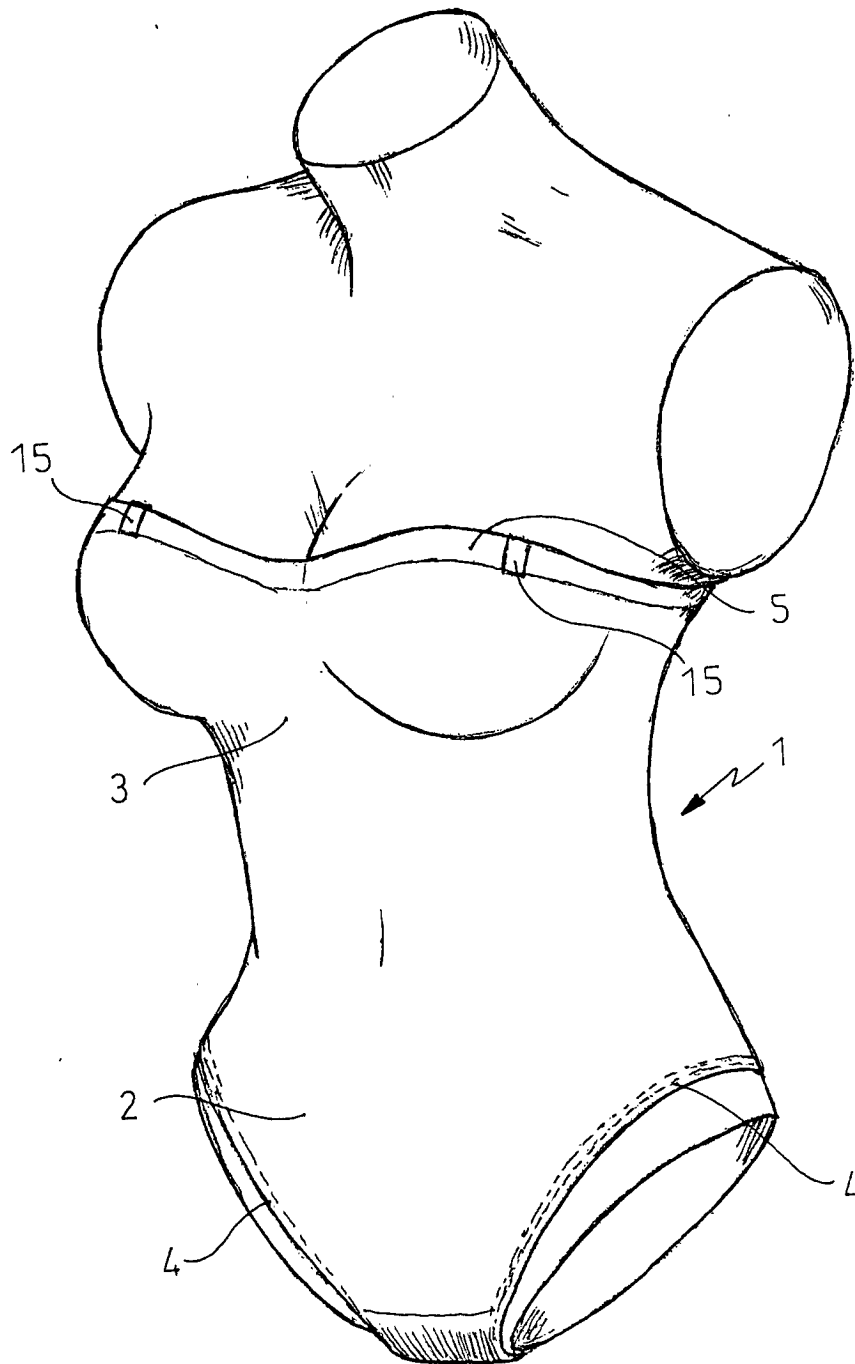


FIG. 2

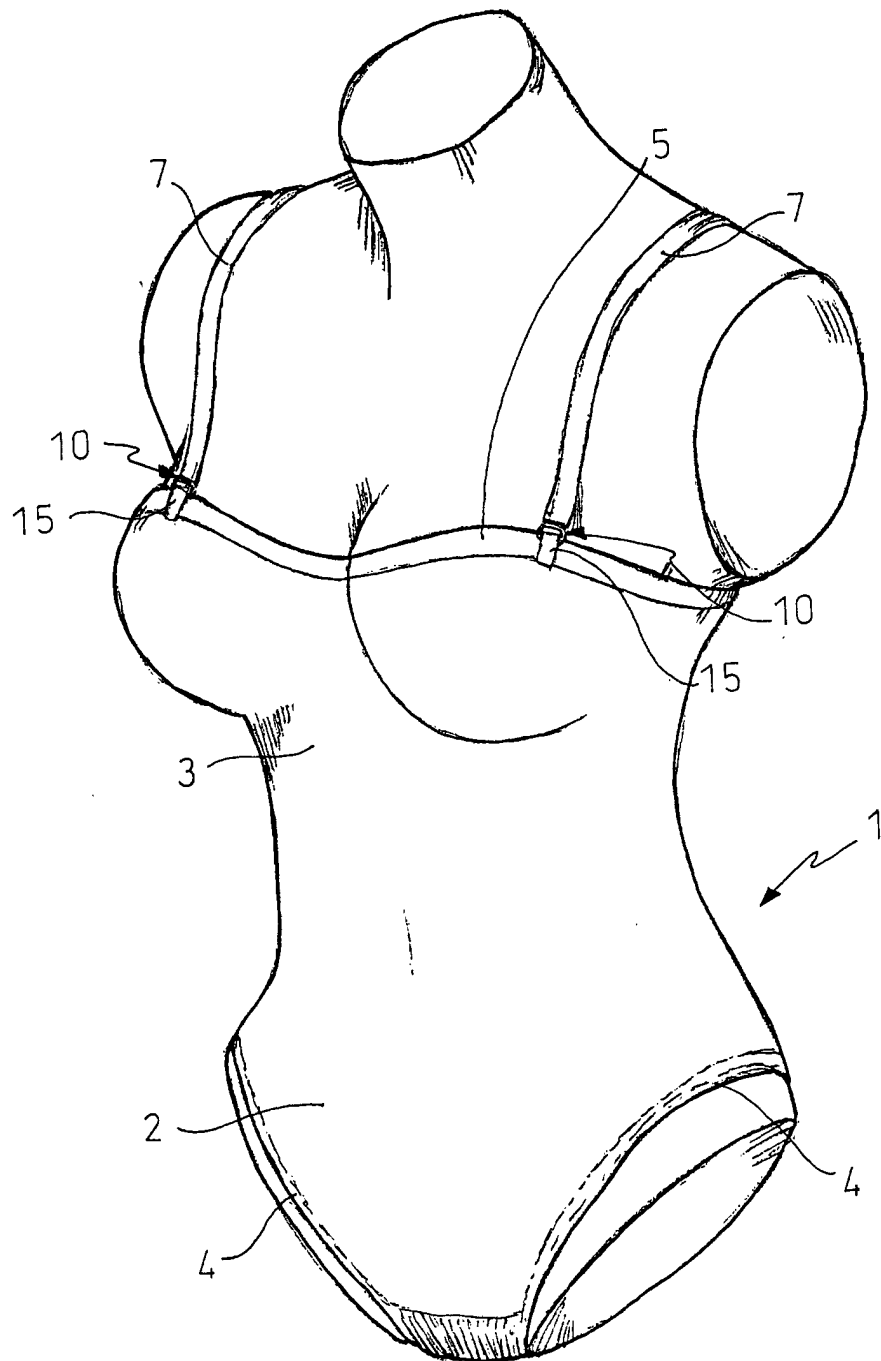


FIG. 3

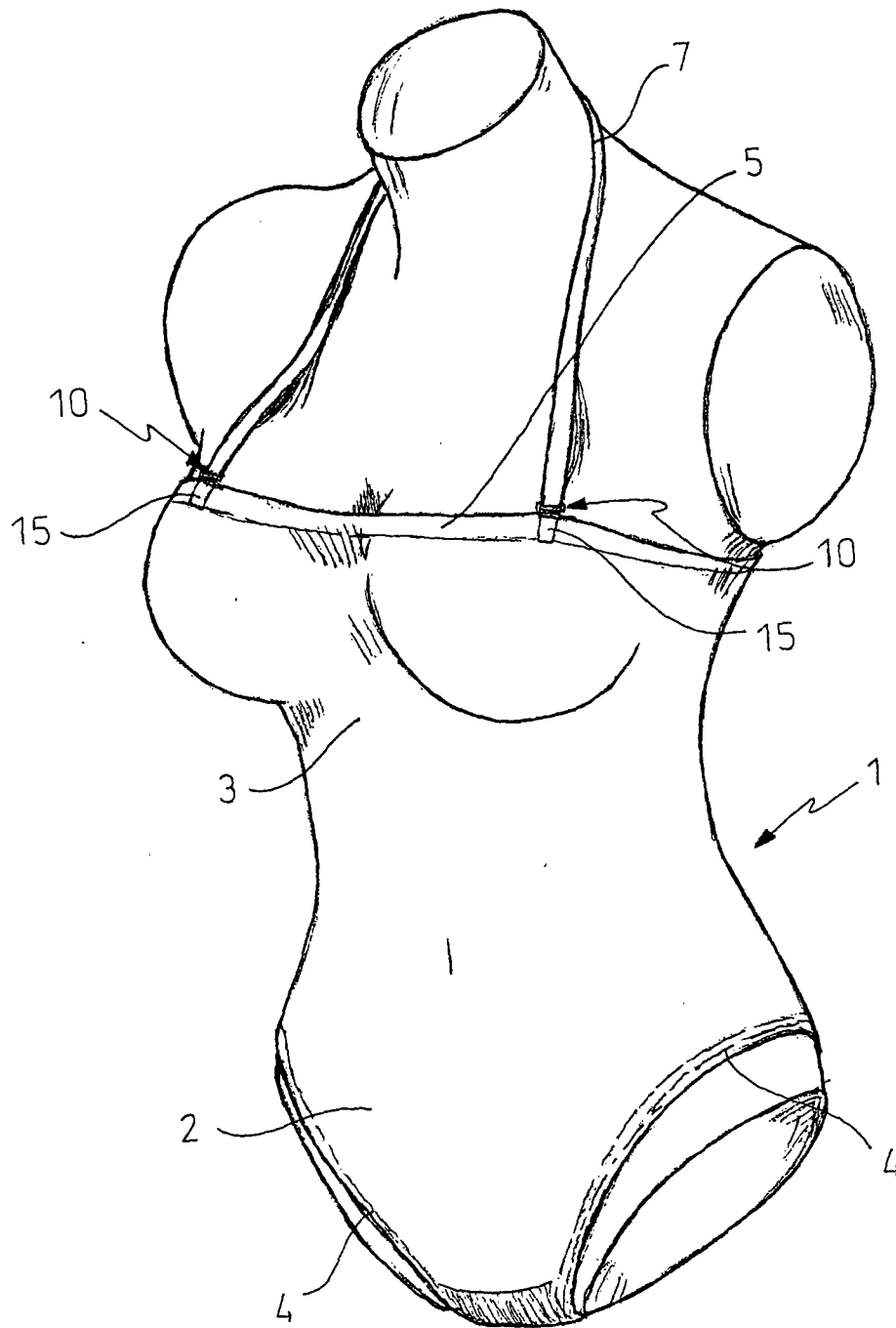


FIG. 4

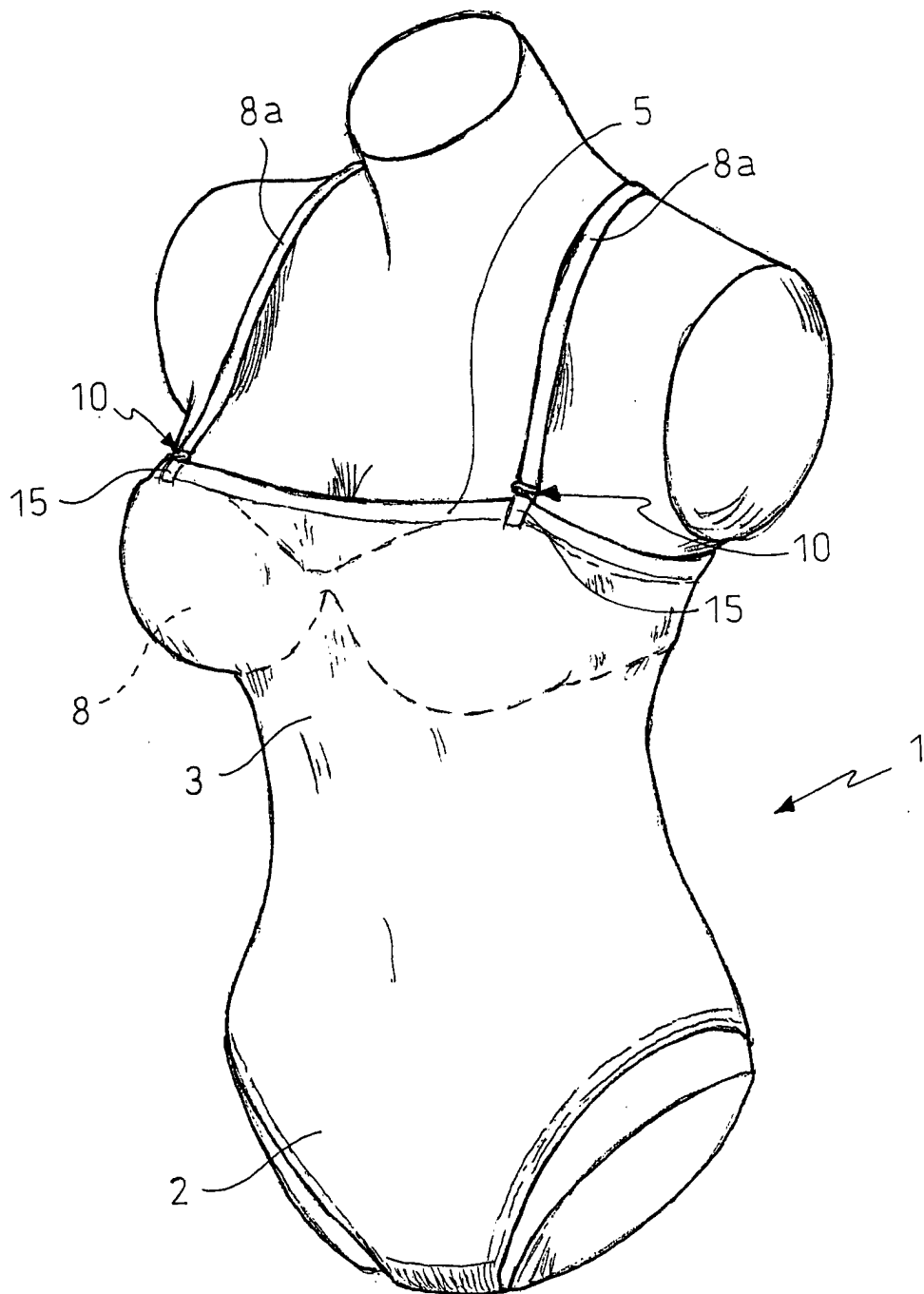


FIG.5

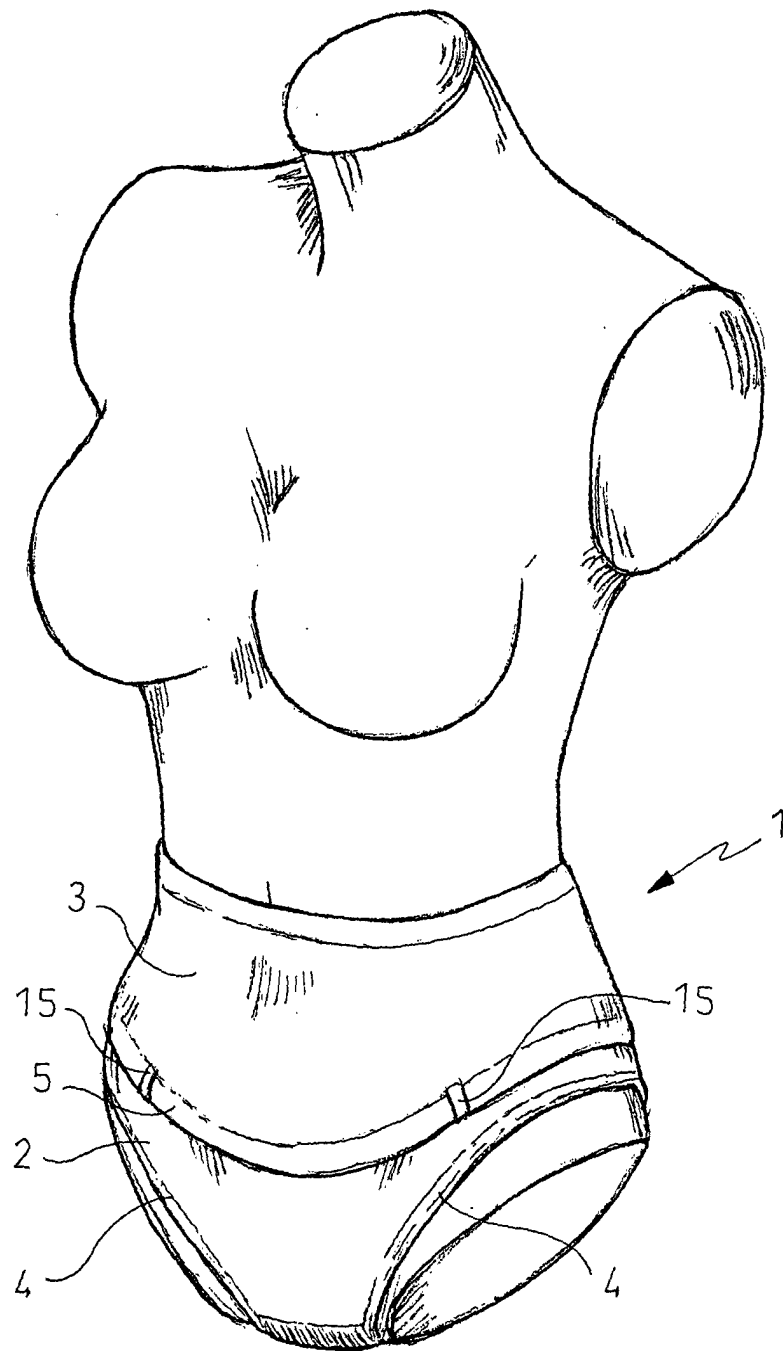


FIG. 6

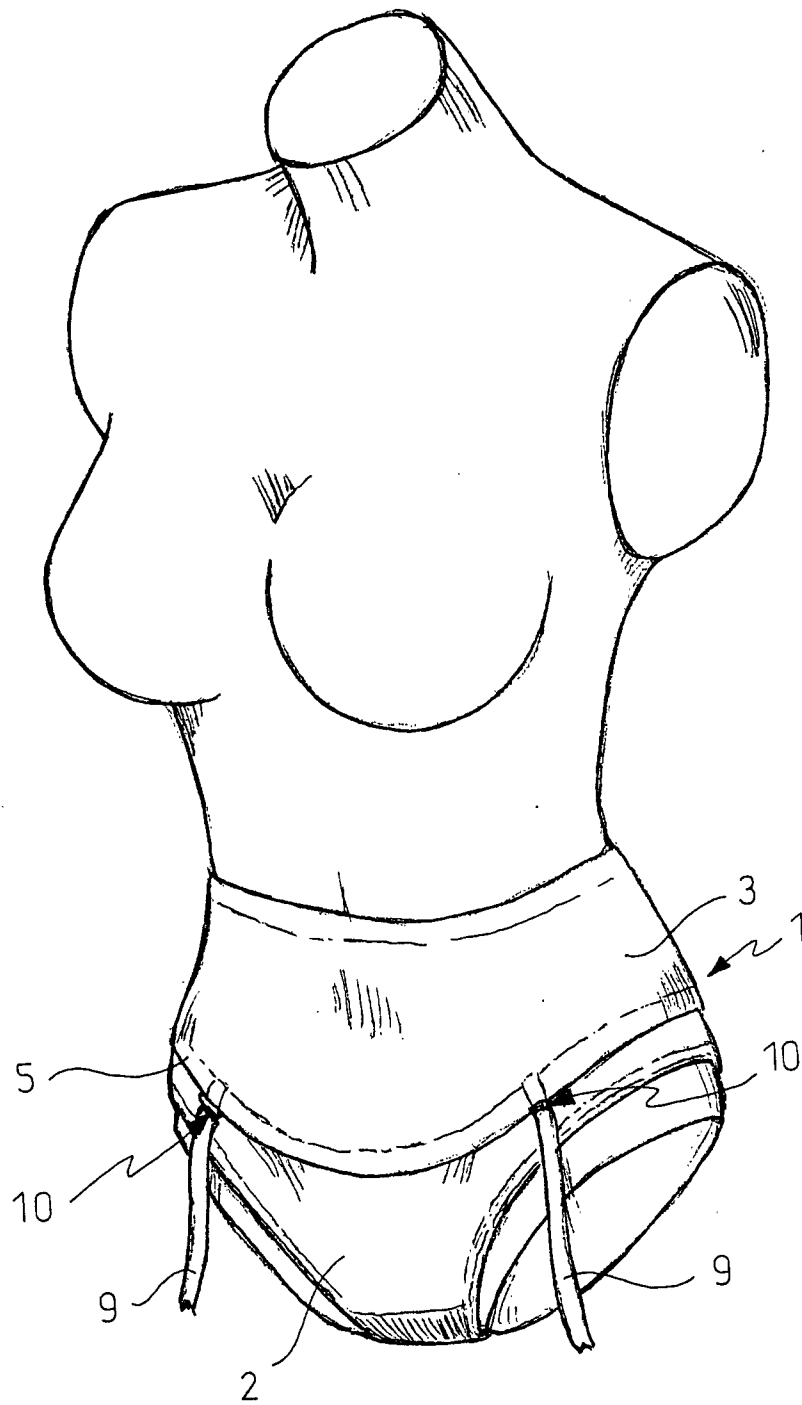


FIG. 7

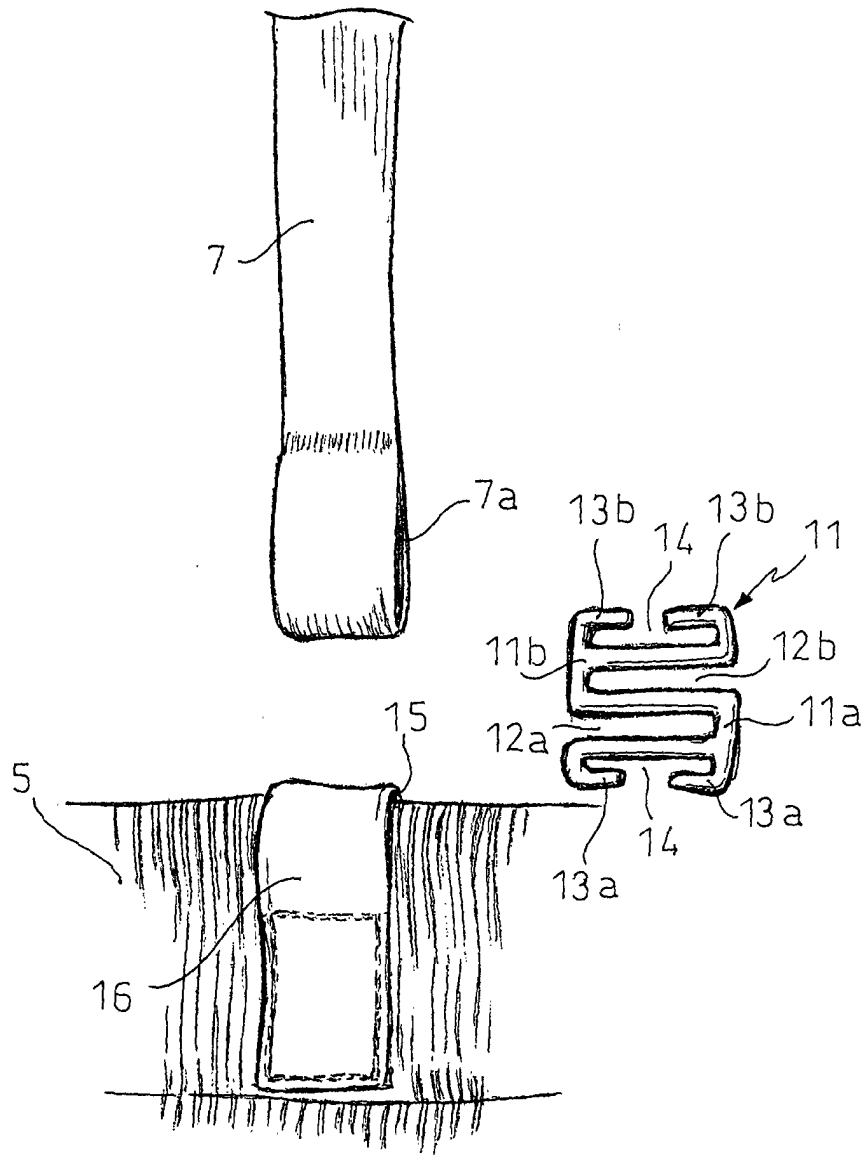


FIG. 8



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 00 83 0457

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 20 November 2000	Examiner Monné, E
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	

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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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