

## BRAND PROFILE: LORNA JANE

Although some might dispute it, Brisbane-based brand Lorna Jane claims to have invented the term 'activewear' and to have shared not just its clothing collections but its philosophy for a healthy lifestyle with millions of women across Australia and, now, around the rest of the world too.

# The brand that invented activewear

**A**ustralian activewear brand Lorna Jane is celebrating its first year in the Canadian market by making its clothing collections available for purchase at Sport Chek stores across the country. Lorna Jane, which specialises in fashionable gym apparel, opened its first Canadian store in Calgary in last November, quickly followed by a showroom in Vancouver in December and a second store in Toronto this year. Now Sport Chek, Canada's largest retailer of sports clothing and sports equipment, will sell the brand's sports bras, leggings, and tanks at 45 of its stores across the country.

This is just the latest leg of the international expansion of a brand (and, the company argues, the philosophy behind it). Lorna Jane's Canadian adventure follows earlier moves into the US market (it opened its first store there in Malibu in 2012) and it also has a presence, through third-party stockists, in the Netherlands, Austria, the UK and a number of other countries around the world. By the time international expansion began, however, the brand already had more than 100 stores in its native Australia, the first one opening in the home city of founder, Lorna Jane Clarkson, Brisbane, in 1990.

### Technical but feminine

Ms Clarkson had been working as a fitness instructor and began designing and constructing her own fitness garments out of frustration at the unattractiveness of "dull and uninspiring" women's gym wear at the time. She says that, as

*Brand founder, Lorna Jane Clarkson, wants to make 'move, nourish, believe' a global movement for active women.*

 Lorna Jane



well as starting to create activewear at that relatively early date, she was the first to use this now common term for clothing collections that, in her words, “transcend gym and yoga studios to reach everyday life and every occasion”. Her “technical but feminine” tops, shorts, leggings, skirts and other products quickly won a following among gym enthusiasts in Brisbane, including many of the women to whom Lorna Jane Clarkson was giving instruction. She made clothes in her spare time and women queued up to buy them. Design and fashion awards followed. The company has continued to grow and now has more than 200 stores in Australia and North America and stockists in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, but it’s still “proudly Australian” and employs more than 1,200 in its home country.

### Clothing combinations

Current collections contain lots of variety: T-shirts, tanks, sweatshirts in the tops category; shorts, sweat-pants and tights of different lengths to complement. There are bras for general sports activity but also activity-specific ones such as the Motion Yoga bra. Many of these garments use a proprietary fabric called LJ Active, which comes with high levels of wickability plus quick-drying and cool-touch functionality. On the Lorna Jane website, every piece comes with recommendations for combinations that the company thinks will work in the gym or the yoga studio, and later at a social event. For example, the Brooklyn Casual tank will work on the running track or for a weights session at the gym, the brand suggests, but also, combined with jeans and white sneakers, at a weekend brunch afterwards.

Much of the brand’s momentum seems to come from its founder. Lorna Jane Clarkson has led the company from start-up to global expansion and has still managed to find time to write books. She’s written five so far, covering, mostly, a three-part philosophy she has come up with to encourage women to engage with active living. The three components are ‘move, nourish, believe’. It’s how Ms Clarkson lives her own life and she wants more and more women to take up her example, turning it into a “global movement”. She explains: “By moving your body every day, giving your body the nutrients it needs to think and perform at its best, and going forward in life with a positive mindset you will discover an abundance of energy and mindfulness, which is vital for long-term wellbeing and improved mental health.”

### A blow to confidence

In her most recent book, ‘Love You’, written with her husband, Bill, she talks extensively about the benefits women can gain from “taking



*Australian entrepreneur Lorna Jane Clarkson claims to have coined the term ‘activewear’.*

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back power” and loving themselves. She says this came about after 18 months of running an ‘active schools’ programme for girls, encouraging them to love and believe in themselves. But she reveals that she was also inspired to put the key messages into book-form by her own experience of being in the media spotlight in recent years because of controversies surrounding complaints about a job advertisement that, according to critics, suggested the company was discriminating against larger people. Lorna Jane has always denied this, insisting its people “come in all shapes and sizes”.

For Ms Clarkson herself, she says the whole experience deeply upset her and “played havoc with” her self-confidence. She stuck to ‘move, nourish, believe’ and realised that other women who had suffered a similar loss of confidence may be able to benefit from hearing about her experience. She says: “Social media and our obsession with celebrity are taking our focus away from being who we are and taking our attention away from what we want to do with our lives. I think we need to stop seeking likes on social media and start to like ourselves, spend less time looking at other people’s lives and start working on where we want to go with our own lives instead.”

Active lifestyles will help, she says, as will nourishing the body “from the inside out” and believing that “anything is possible”. 