

Slide Fasteners

By Perry Jones, Piney Wood Model A Ford Club



Although not common during the Model A Era, the slide fastener, or what we now refer to as a zipper, could be found in an array of items. One example is the Saks Fifth Avenue advertisement to the left which is from 1931 The New York Times, featuring a Sports Wear outfit with a suede blouse with the “convenience of a talon fastener”.

History

The story begins when Elias Howe, Jr., inventor of the sewing machine, received a patent in 1851 for an "Automatic, Continuous Clothing Closure." Howe's device was more like an elaborate drawstring than a true slide fastener, but because of the success of the sewing machine, Howe did not pursue marketing his clothing closure system.

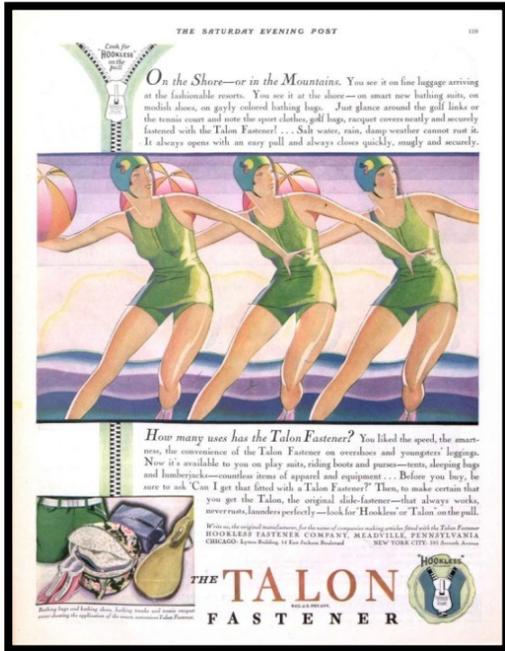
Forty-four years later, inventor Whitcomb Judson marketed a "Clasp Locker" device, similar to the system described in the 1851 Howe patent. Being first to market, Whitcomb got credit for being the "inventor of the zipper." However, his 1893 patent did not use the word zipper. The Chicago inventor's "Clasp Locker" was a complicated hook-and-eye shoe fastener. Together with businessman Colonel Lewis Walker, Whitcomb launched the Universal Fastener Company to manufacture the new device. The clasp locker debuted at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and was met with little commercial success. The Universal Fastener Company moved to Meadville, Pennsylvania, where it operated for most of the 20th century under the name Talon, Inc.



Frisco Employees Magazine 1929

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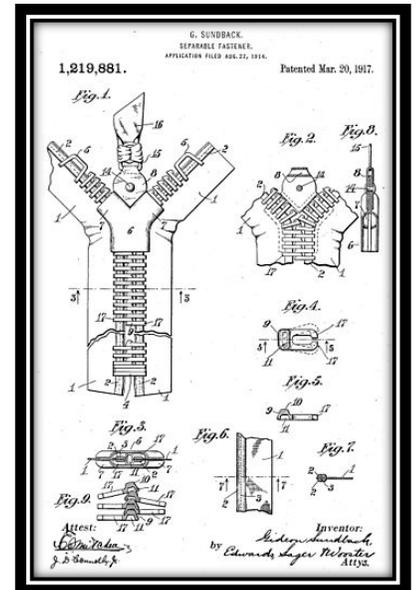


It was a Swedish-born electrical engineer named Gideon Sundbäck whose work helped make the zipper the hit it is today. Originally hired to work for the Universal Fastener Company, his design skills and a marriage to the plant-manager's daughter led to a position as head designer at Universal. In his position, he improved the far from perfect "Judson C-curity Fastener."

When Sundbäck's wife died in 1911, the grieving husband busied himself at the design table. By December of 1913, he

came up with what would become the modern zipper.

Sundbäck's new and improved system increased the number of fastening elements from four per inch to 10 or 11, had two facing-rows of teeth that pulled into a single piece by the slider and increased the opening for the teeth guided by the slider. His patent for the "Separable Fastener" was issued in 1917.



Naming the Zipper

The term 'zipper' is said to be derived from the 'zip' sound the invention makes when zipping, first used in 1923 by the American B. F. Goodrich Company. The company opted to use Sundbäck's fastener on a new type of rubber boots (or galoshes) and referred to it as the zipper, and the name stuck. The two chief uses of the zipper in its early years were for closing boots and tobacco pouches. Zippers began being used for clothing in 1925 by Schott NYC on leather jackets.

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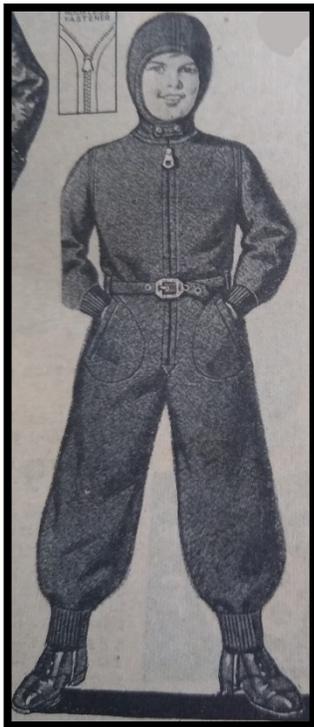
In the 1930s, a sales campaign began for children's clothing featuring zippers. The campaign advocated zippers as a way to promote self-reliance in young children as the devices made it possible for them to dress in self-help clothing.

The Battle of the Fly:

A landmark moment happened in 1937 when the zipper beat the button in the "Battle of the Fly." French fashion designers raved over the use of zippers in men's trousers and Esquire magazine declared the zipper the "Newest Tailoring Idea for Men."

Zippers in the Model A Era:

Within the MAFCA Fashion Guidelines, there are six mentions of slide fasteners or zippers. "Slide fasteners or zippers, were discussed in men's tailors' magazines, but were not commonly used in the fly until after the Model A era. They could be found in pockets or down the front of coveralls (as seen on page one)."



"To the left, a heavy washable cotton suede cloth that looks like fine suede leather and wears almost as well. This three-piece set, with sliding rustproof fastener, is practical for boys and girls."

Additionally they were found in both men's and women's golf bags for the ball and shoe compartments.



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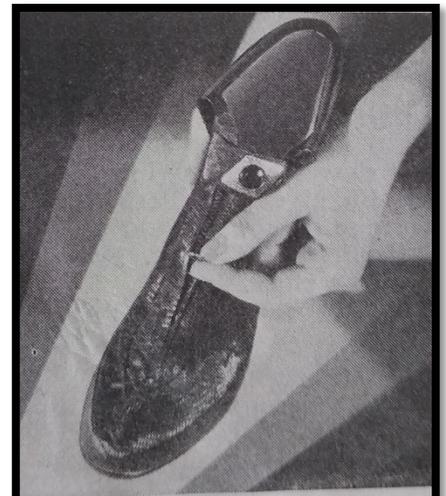
The two images to the left are from the same Talon advertisement found in the 1931 Ladies Home Journal. "Traveling Case – equipped with a Talon Slide Fastener. It can be opened or closed in an instant – but it can't come open accidentally." If you are heading to

the beach "The very newest knitted bathing suits have a Talon Slide Fastener at the back of the jersey. Beach pajamas are cotton mesh and Talon-fastened at the side. And the polo shirt of cotton mesh is Talon-fastened, too – at the front."

While the Slide Fastener did exist during the Model A Era, they were not as accepted and used like they are today.

References:

- Montgomery Ward & Co. Fall & Winter 1929-30
- Vogue 1931
- Ladies Home Journal 1931
- Woman's Home Companion 1930
- Belle Hess 1930-31
- New York Times April 7, 1931
- Gideon Sundbäck / Public domain / via Wikimedia Commons
- Federico, P.J. "The Invention and Introduction of the Zipper." *Journal of the Patent Office Society* 855.12 (1946).
- Friedel, Robert. "Zipper: An Exploration in Novelty." New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996.
- Judson, Whitcomb L. "Clasp locker or unlocker for shoes." Patent 504,038. U.S. Patent Office, August 29, 1893.



B. F. Goodrich Footwear
Woman's Home Companion 1930

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