

Loca

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Flying by the seat of his pants

So August has arrived and it's hotter than a depot stove and you're sweating like a race horse and even the half-block stroll from your air-conditioned car to your air-conditioned office results in serious chafing. Down there because your underwear is bound tighter than all the Boy Scout knots ever tied.

Count your blessings.



**SAM
VENABLE**

At least you're able to change those unmentionables on a regular basis. That's an option Koichi Wakata didn't have for an entire month.

Wakata, 46, was a member of the crew of the space shuttle Endeavour that returned to Cape Canaveral last Friday. He had been in outer space for 4½ months.

For the final month, he wore the same skivvies.

Wore them continuously, you understand. The same pair. Unwashed and unchanged. 'Round the clock.

This was not a matter of poor hygiene. It was done in the name of science. And you thought drinking Tang instead of real orange juice while orbiting the Earth was a sacrifice.

This was a test of "J-Wear," a line of clothing designed by Jaxa, the Japanese space agency. They are billed as "anti-static, flame-resistant, odor-eating, bacteria-killing and water-absorbent."

Wakata's wardrobe also consisted of J-Wear shirts, pants and socks. Presumably he changed them routinely.

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Wakata confirmed his underwear passed with flying colors — which, now that I reconsider, may not be the best choice of words in this context.

"My station crew members never complained for about a month," he told reporters, "so I think the experiment went fine."

Yeah, right.

Far be it from me to question official NASA information, but I'll bet you a six-pack of Hanes all-cotton huggers everyone else in the crew called this guy names like His Royal Flatulence, Dr. Foulwind, Sir Stinky and Mister Moisture behind his back.

In a related matter, which I swear on a stack of Bibles I'm not making up, NASA said the air-purifying system on the U.S. side of the space station continued to fail during this mission. Coincidence? You tell me.

According to Jaxa, these undies are a cross between boxers and briefs. They are seamless, silver-coated "comfortable everyday clothes for life in a spaceship."

Say what?

In terms of underdrawers, "silver-coated" and "comfortable" are mutually exclusive.

As one who breaks out in a rash even at the thought of polyester blends, I cannot imagine anything more grating on the nether regions than a layer of silver. I bet poor ol' astronaut Wakata would have given a month's pay for a tube of Gold Bond powder during his ordeal.

Amazingly, things could be worse than (1) wearing the same undies for a month or (2) working alongside someone who has worn the same undies for a month.

I quote directly from the London Times: "His clothing has been placed in special bags ready to be taken to a laboratory, where experts will examine how well it held up to the challenge."

Surely these people will get hazardous duty pay.

Sam Venable's column appears on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. He may be reached at 865-342-6272 or VenableS@knoxnews.com. His latest book, "Someday I May Find Honest Work: A Newspaper Humorist's Life," is available at bookstores, the University of Tennessee Press and online from the News Sentinel.

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