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Perpetrator Problem: It's Hard to Run Away In Falling Trousers

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Cops Say Loose, Baggy Jeans
Trip Up Many a Thief;
'Hey, Dude, Buy a Belt'

By SERENA NG

One sunny afternoon in January, Vicki Chandler, a 55-year-old underwriting associate at Cigna HealthCare in Chattanooga, Tenn., was walking to her car when a teenager in loose khaki pants approached her, pointed to her pocketbook and said, "I need that." As she recounts the incident, he snatched the purse and took off.

But then he ran into trouble. As he ran, his loose trousers slipped down be-



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low his hips. As he reached down to hold them up, the teen was forced to throw the purse aside.

"That boy, he could run fast but he got caught up by his pants, which were real big and baggy," says Ms. Chandler, whose purse was retrieved by a parking attendant who had heard her cries for help.

It's a problem for perpetrators. Young men and teens wearing low-slung, baggy pants fairly regularly get tripped up in their getaways, a development that has given amused police officers and law-abiding citizens a welcome edge in the fight against crime.

James Green might have made a clean getaway when he stole seven DVDs from a Blockbuster store in Ferndale, Mich., last October. But he, too, was undone by his baggy pants.

Mr. Green, 30, rode away on a bicycle, with copies of "Donnie Brasco," "The Bourne Identity" and "Sin City." When a patrol car knocked over the bike, he fled on foot. As he ran, his trousers slipped down past his hips, and he tripped. He hitched up his pants and ran a few more yards before falling again.

Things got worse and worse for Mr. Green. He finally kicked off his pants and shoes and "ran into the yard of 1720 Beaufield," police officer Kenneth Jaklic said in a report of the incident. "I ran after [Mr. Green], yelling at him to stop." Instead, Mr. Green jumped over a fence behind a garage, and Mr. Jaklic immobilized him with two Taser darts in the back.

Mr. Green pleaded guilty to charges of resisting arrest and retail fraud and spent 30 days in jail. He could not be located for comment.

Denny Fuhrman, a 58-year-old police officer in Lynnwood, Wash., was escorting a handcuffed suspect to his patrol car one afternoon in 2004 when the youngster twisted free and took off running.

As he bolted, the baggy blue jeans he was wearing fell down around his ankles, sending him tumbling onto the pavement of a busy street. "He was rolling around in traffic, looking like a fish out of water," recalls Mr. Fuhrman.

Mr. Fuhrman's suspect wiggled out
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Could you maybe pass
this on to the lady
who is concerned about
this "fashion" hrs?
It might give her some
satisfaction - :)

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cc: ccom
c/mgr.
Ms. Rosa Williams
Marlene Hanna

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Low-Slung, Baggy Pants Often Trip Up Thieves

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of his trousers before getting up from the street and running toward a nearby mall, as the police officer radioed a description to his colleagues: "White male, running, no pants, in handcuffs," Mr. Fuhrman recalls saying. The young man was arrested at the entrance of a J.C. Penney store after Janice Lewis, a 61-year-old passerby, grabbed his shirt



Jim Matheny

collar and held on to him until police arrived.

"He was pretty wild," says Ms. Lewis, a grandmother of 10 who broke a knuckle during the scuffle. "I didn't even realize he was in his underwear till the police flipped him over."

Police declined to release the full name of the youth,

identified only as Jason in written reports, because he was not convicted of a crime in connection with the incident. He had been arrested after allegedly trying to access a bank account that wasn't his.

Low-hanging baggy pants have been a fashion statement for young men for more than a decade, inspired by the advent of beltless prison jeans, says Andy Gilchrist, a California fashion consultant who has written a book on men's clothes. Over time, the tough-guy image associated with oversized trousers helped make the look standard for hip-hop performers, alternative music bands, skateboarders

and snowboarders as it migrated from mostly black city streets to affluent white suburbs.

Just about every other week, Jim Matheny, a 41-year-old police lieutenant in Stamford, Conn., says he gets into foot chases with youths. He says it's getting easier to capture them because they can't run fast or far in those loose jeans.

"When I catch them, I tell them they'd do much better if they had pants that fit," says Lt. Matheny, who says he has had to help hold up the pants of his suspects while patting them down to search for drugs or weapons. "It's like: 'Hey dude, buy a belt and save yourself some trouble.'"

Ill-fitting pants aren't suited for jumping, either, as Noah Donell Brown of Hendersonville, N.C., learned. The 24-year-old tried to leap over the counter of a Subway sandwich shop during a robbery attempt, but he stumbled and came crashing down in front of several startled store employees. Mr. Brown, armed with a gun, got up and fled into a nearby residential neighborhood as the police were notified.

Police didn't have to work hard to arrest him. As Mr. Brown tried to scale a picket fence in someone's backyard, he caught his pants, according to the police department. He was found dangling upside down, his pants at his ankles and tangled in the fence.

"He didn't make a good jump," said Hendersonville Police Chief Donnie Parks, who spotted Mr. Brown on the fence. "The only reason we caught the guy was because his pants fell down,"

he said, adding: "He was wearing underwear, thank goodness."

Hendersonville police used a knife to cut Mr. Brown free. He is currently serving time in prison after pleading guilty to attempted robbery with a dangerous weapon. His lawyer, Greg Newman, who has since become the mayor of Hendersonville, said he had not spoken to Mr. Brown since 2003. Mr. Brown, serving his sentence at Gaston Correctional Center in Dallas, N.C., could not be contacted for comment.

Dwight Oliver showed up for a court hearing in Seminole County, Fla., wearing loose pants and tennis shoes without laces. While waiting for his case to be called, Mr. Oliver tried to flee. He lost his pants as he ran down the steps of the courthouse.

He was later found in gray boxer shorts in a library three blocks from the courthouse and was arrested after a scuffle with police officers. It turned out the charges he was scheduled to face in court that day were dropped. He was slapped with new charges of resisting arrest and sentenced to two and a half years in jail for the incident. He served 17 months and was released in April.

"Those pants certainly didn't help

him escape, and if he had just sat and waited, he would have been fine," said F. Wesley "Buck" Blankner Jr., who was Mr. Oliver's lawyer. Mr. Oliver didn't return calls seeking comment. His mother, Alice Oliver, said: "He wears pants like that, but he usually wears a belt."

Karl Franklin tried to run from police in Tallahassee, Fla., in pants that were on fire. According to a police report, the 30-year-old had stashed a lighted cigarette in his baggy pants and appeared to be preparing to urinate at a traffic intersection.

Seth Stoughton, a police officer at the time, approached Mr. Franklin and noticed the man's pocket was smoldering. Mr. Franklin, who could not be reached, started to run, but his pants dropped and tripped him up.

"I tried to slap the fire out, but he was struggling and kicking me, so I couldn't do much but hold him down," recalls Mr. Stoughton, who now works as a fraud investigator. When other officers arrived, they cut off the burning patch of cloth and arrested Mr. Franklin. He was charged with resisting arrest, but he later pleaded guilty to lesser charges and spent 10 days in jail.