

New fabric has more than a fighting chance

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FASHION

NEW ZEALAND entrepreneurs have developed a fashionable fabric they say could transform martial arts.

Invented to absorb blood and sweat, their Fortitude fabric will make its official runway debut during New Zealand Fashion Week next month, featuring in the AgResearch show on September 23.

Three designers, including Wellington's Alexandra Owen, have made garments for the show using the performance fightwear fabric.

Model Brooke Anderson gave Owen's outfit a test run yesterday, though having her collar gripped by the fabric's co-inventor and judo black belt, Grant Scott, was not exactly what she was expecting.

Mr Scott and his partner, Lavinia Calvert of Gimono, have spent the past five years researching and developing Fortitude, commissioning AgResearch to de-

velop their fabric.

Mr Scott came up with the idea on a visit to Tokyo in 2005 while training in judo. At the end of each day, he found himself in a "smelly, blood-stained gi" – the standard two-piece uniform for martial artists.

Until now, the white double-weave cotton gi has had a chokehold on martial-arts wear. It is heavy, absorbs moisture, causes chaffing, takes a long time to dry, is prone to shrinkage, and difficult to remove stains from.

"Every major sport in the world has a performance offering of some sort and it seemed odd that marital arts didn't. It got us thinking," Ms Calvert said.

The Dunedin pair say their fabric is lightweight, cannot be torn, is shrink resistant, colourfast, soft against the skin, breathes and doesn't smell.



Showing fortitude: Judo black belt Grant Scott shows model Brooke Anderson just how tough her Alexandra Owen-designed outfit is, thanks to his new Fortitude fabric. Photo: CHRIS SKELTON