

First peek at Cotton On global mega store

JESSICA COATES

COTTON On is preparing to unveil its new-look global flagship store in the heart of Geelong.

The Geelong Advertiser was allowed an exclusive sneak peek at the Westfield store, which will officially open on Saturday.

The 900sqm store – three times the size of Cotton On's traditional stores – will see men's, women's and Cotton On Body clothing sold under one roof.

Described by Cotton On's head of global customer experience Rob Hede as "heritage-inspired with elevated finishes", the store's entrance gives the impression of a brick-and-mortar streetscape.

Mr Hede said the scale and size of the store was something Geelong hadn't yet seen from the brand.

"We've opened amazing stores in LA, Singapore and Hong Kong, now to have one 5km from the head office and where it all began is pretty amazing," he said.

"We want it to feel like a hometown store, with a forward-looking brand."

The grand reopening also promises a peek at Cotton On's new season range before it officially launches Australia-wide next week.

One of Australia's largest retailers, Cotton On was born from the boot of a Ford Bronco at Corio's Beckley Park Markets in 1988.

A dedicated denim section in the new store pays tribute to the heritage of founder Nigel Austin's first-generation jackets.

The first Cotton On store opened in Geelong in 1991 and was a staple in many Aussie households by the early 2000s.

The brand announced its first international expansion



Cotton On Geelong staff Amelia Pitzner and Eden Govus gear up for the opening and (below) the calming fitting rooms and wood-panelled store interior. Pictures: Brad Fleet



in 2006, and now operates in more than 20 countries worldwide.

The Geelong-based empire now spans more than 1500 stores and seven brands, including Cotton On Body, Typo and Factorie.

New technology shows digital lookbooks to potential shoppers, while a central marble countertop, new-look

wood treatments, columns and finishings set the store apart from others.

Another initiative allows shoppers to order clothes direct to their home, for no extra charge, if the store doesn't have their size in stock.

"Team members have their own personal mobile device as well so they can search

for certain styles," Mr Hede said.

"It's about creating a seamless, easy moment for the customer."

Mr Hede said new, roomy wood-panelled fitting rooms had been designed to create a calming, quiet moment while shoppers tried on clothes.

A usual 12-week turnaround had stretched into

more than five months of planning for the design and layout of the new flagship store.

"It took nearly six months to plan and finish the store," Mr Hede said.

The Cotton On store moved from its longtime Geelong CBD home in Market Square Shopping Centre in May last year.

Qantas back in black in big way

HOLLY HALES

QANTAS has recorded a half-yearly \$1bn profit after years of pandemic-induced losses.

The airline's turnaround follows a \$456m loss for the previous 12 months.

It recorded an underlying profit before tax of \$1.43bn, along with a statutory profit after tax of \$1bn. That is 49 per cent higher than its previous first-half record result, in the 2018 financial year.

Qantas' net debt also fell to \$2.4bn, resulting in statutory earnings of 53.9c a share. The results marked a \$2.7bn turnaround on the previous period.

Total revenue came in at just under \$10bn, more than three times that for the first half of the last financial year.

Chief executive Alan Joyce said there were several factors behind the turnaround.

"The first is travel demand, which remains very robust, particularly leisure travel," he said on Thursday.

"While interest rates and inflation are expected to hit discretionary spending at some point, we've yet to see any signs of that moving forward."

"In fact, the research shows that travel is one area that people want to prioritise over the next 12 months."

Qantas said fuel costs were up 65 per cent compared with before the pandemic, while fares had increased 20 per cent since 2021.

DEMENTIA HELP CALL

WITH dementia overtaking heart disease as the biggest health issue for Australians aged 65 and over, Dementia Australia has reiterated the need for a dementia-informed healthcare system.

CEO Maree McCabe said with the number of Australians living with dementia expected to top 800,000 by 2058, dementia was the chronic disease of the 21st century.

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