



Zoe Vink, Amber Jade, Justin Lacko and Jade Pummeroy will be spreading the cheer in next month's L'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival.

PICTURE: SIMON O'DWYER

Why sourpuss is so last season on the catwalk

Sullen's out and smiley's in, as festivals rediscover the fun in fashion, writes **Melissa Kent**.

WITH facial expressions running the emotional gamut from unimpressed to downright moody, catwalk models appear to have an unpleasant job. That's because smiling on the runway is, well, frowned upon.

So strict is the no-smile edict, flashing a grin is usually a far more serious infraction than accidentally flashing a pair of knickers.

Which will make the L'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival almost revolutionary when it kicks off next month: models will be told to look happy.

Adopting the theme Get Happy, the festival's 2010 advertising campaign features models who are not just smiling but laughing uproariously.

So why this new-found glee in the serious world of fashion?

Director Karen Webster says the upbeat directive aims to

shake off last year's doom and gloom with the message that fashion is fun.

"When you look at these images you can't help but smile yourself," she said.

"It dawned on me last year during one of our shows that there was a real buzz and so much excitement and anticipation. Yet at the time we were in the midst of an economic crisis

and in Victoria we had just been through the most hideous time in our history.

"I was really concerned that the festival would be seen as flippant, but actually it was the opposite. People were looking for a feel-good factor that wasn't going to cost them a fortune. So this year we've decided to embrace it. It's about bringing people together to have a great time."

Conventional wisdom on catwalk etiquette is that smiling models can distract from the outfit while blank expressions

make for more inconspicuous clothes hangers.

Normally, only big-name models, such as Miranda Kerr, Jennifer Hawkins and Megan Gale, are allowed to smile on the catwalk. Last week, the festival's organisers selected 350 hopefuls at a casting call at Malvern Town Hall. They will parade the autumn-winter ranges of a designer line-up including Yeojin Bae, Life with Bird, Alpha60, Thurley, Aurelio Costarella and Mimco.

It is up to individual designers to determine whether models look happy or downcast, depending on the look they want to create for their brand.

"Personally, I love to see a model smile," Ms Webster said. "I don't want them to look miserable. I want them to look like they love wearing those clothes."

Model Zoe Vink, 22, who attended the casting call, said she had noticed an increase in the number of catwalk shows



that required her to smile in recent months.

"It depends on the designer but I have done a lot of shows lately where we've been told to smile," she said. "I find it easier because you get a better reaction from the audience."

A spokesman for Myer, however, which launches its new season collection next month, said autumn-winter collections required more of a sombre look.

The L'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival runs from March 14 to 21.



The Melbourne Fashion Festival is embracing the feel-good factor.