



Style Icon: Gary Cooper

Description

Some men dress up well (Cary Grant), and some men dress down well (Steve McQueen), but Gary Cooper dressed well all of the time. Kitted out in a plaid shirt and faded jeans he was every inch the rugged outdoorsman, and yet he was able to look just as natural in a dinner jacket, or even white tie. As well as being a fine actor Cooper was a real man, and enjoyed skiing, hunting, sailing and fast cars. In *Enduring Style*, G Bruce Boyer's excellent book about Cooper's clothes, the actor is photographed at the wheel of an impressive convertible Duesenberg, with a finely wrought dimple in his tie.

Cooper dressed so consistently well that it's hard to single out particular outfits, but he hit a particular sweet spot when he wore a sports jacket, shirt and tie with odd trousers. There's a shot in *Enduring Style* of Cooper in a soft tweed jacket in a bold Prince of Wales check carrying a tennis racquet under his arm. Amazingly, given that he's arguably overdressed for the tennis court, he looks comfortable, sporty and relaxed.

Of course Cooper did have certain physical advantages that few of us can emulate. His athletic lifestyle gave him a slim but powerful looking body with the broad shoulders idealized in fashion illustrations from the Thirties and Forties. And he accentuated that frame through his dedication to high-waisted trousers, which he belted around his slender waist, rather than his hips. But perhaps Cooper was simply born stylish. There's an image of him as a 20-year-student, in an overcoat with the collar popped, a contrast-collar shirt and silk tie, in which he exudes more elegance than most of us will manage in our entire lifetime.

Three things Gary Cooper can teach us:

- 1 Elegance is about how you live, as well as how you look.
- 2 High-waisted trousers make a man's legs look longer – these have to be tailored.
- 3 It's the way a man dresses in his down time that really separates the wheat from the chaff.

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Author

mansel-fletcher

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