

# SIMPLE STYLE

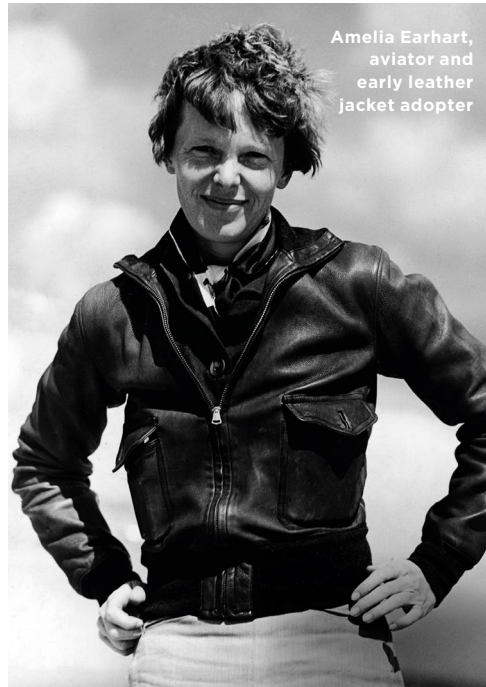
## THE LEATHER JACKET

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

Perhaps it's the fact that the leather jacket\* was originally worn by the adventurous and the brave that makes it an enduring icon of cool. This is a garment that was conceived to withstand the elements, to be hard-working and practical. Unlike mimsy, fashion-led jackets, it didn't make its debut paraded on the catwalk by wafer-thin models. It first appeared on the backs of pioneering aviators and motorcyclists. Little wonder then that it was later adopted by outsiders, rebels and punks. It is anti-fashion. It transcends whim.

Its first manifestation was as a 'bomber' jacket worn by pilots during the First World War. Made from thick animal hide, tucked into the waist, and often lined with sheepskin, it protected them from extreme climate conditions at high altitude. Amelia Earhart, right, the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, also always wore one in the air. During the Second World War, this morphed into the A-2 flight jacket (as worn by Tom Cruise in *Top Gun* and The Fonz in *Happy Days*), which was standard for American military pilots.

The first 'biker' jacket was created in 1928 by Irving Schott, a New York raincoat manufacturer. Designed for Harley



Amelia Earhart,  
aviator and  
early leather  
jacket adopter

*“It first appeared on the backs of pioneering aviators and motorcyclists”*

Davidson, it had a zip rather than buttons, lapels that snapped shut or folded down, zipped pockets and a cropped, snug fit. Called the Perfecto (after Schott's favourite cigar), it was an instant hit with motorcyclists, including Hell's Angels, who customised it with their 'colours' – patches representing their chapter.

The leather jacket became the emblem of the outlaw in 1953 when Marlon Brando wore a Perfecto as leader of the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club in *The Wild One*. He was soon copied by anyone who wanted some of his rebellious cool, whether they had a motorbike or not.

It has continued to be the garment to shrug on for instant street cred ever since. It's hard to think of The Ramones, Sid Vicious (who asked to be buried in his) or Joan Jett without seeing them in theirs. But it's not confined to bad boys – lighter leather and looser, more affordable styles mean it's a casual jacket option for the rest of us. Slip it on over a dress or skinny jeans and you're ready to go. Its rebellious reputation gives it, and you, just a bit more edge than a cardigan. **S**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

### THE UPDATE



THE  
CLASSIC

**Leather biker jacket | £245**

➤ Zips? Check. Button-down lapels? Check. A classic biker jacket for instant cool. [stories.com](http://stories.com)



TWO  
GREAT  
TWISTS

**Filomena draped-front faux leather biker jacket | £120**

➤ The biker updated with a satin front and ribbed panelling. [frenchconnection.com](http://frenchconnection.com)



**Clean leather Trucker jacket | £350**

➤ A lightweight, boxy jacket that can be buttoned up for a smart casual vibe. [jigsaw-online.com](http://jigsaw-online.com)