

HEIGHT OF STYLE

Ray-Ban Aviator sunglasses have gone from being standard-issue for airforce pilots to being style essentials beloved by the man on the street and the red carpet. Lauren Steventon charts their ascendancy.



Few sunglass designs – indeed few fashion designs – can claim the enduring popularity of Ray-Ban’s iconic Aviator. The style has graced the faces of the most recognisable personalities for over 75 years, and found favour with everyone from generals to rappers.

The design might be synonymous with style today, but its origins are more prosaic.

It is the late 1930s. Tensions in Europe are hinting that another large-scale war may be imminent. Aviation technology is rushing to prepare planes that can fly further and higher than ever before and the air force is becoming a formidable and integral part of any army. However, pilots flying these machines are reporting that the closer proximity to the sun is causing headaches and nausea.

New anti-glare goggles were commissioned from Bausch & Lomb and branded as Ray-Ban Aviator. They used green glass to create large lenses that cut out the glare of the sun without reducing visibility. The

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function may have been practical, but the form was very deliberately designed to look good on the dashing airmen of the day. By 1937 the new style was being produced for the general public as well.

As military surplus began to infiltrate fashion

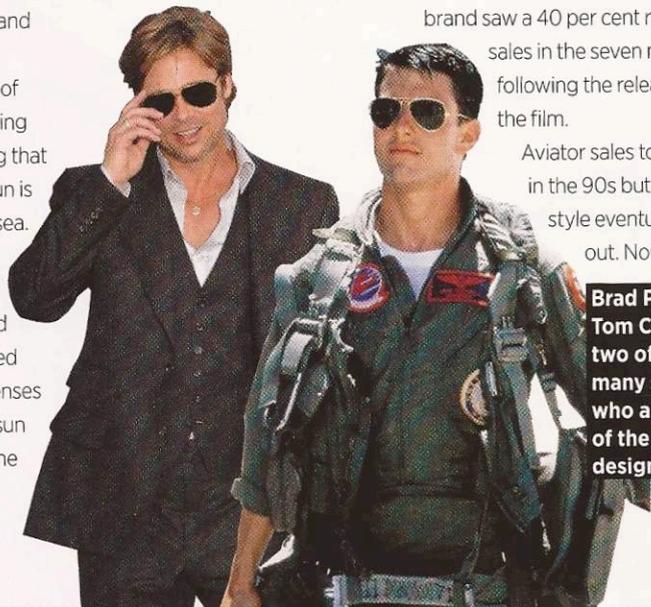
through the 40s and 50s, the Aviator maintained its stylish status. Rather than pilots, musicians and film stars drove its popularity. They embodied the daring, devil-may-care attitude of the fighter pilots in a non-combat

world and the large, reflective lenses of the Aviator gave the impression of non-conformity and exclusivity.

Aviator’s popularity soared with the release of *Top Gun* in 1983. In jeans and leather jacket, the fearless and rebellious Tom Cruise aka ‘Maverick’ was the quintessential 80s screen idol. Of course, he was also a fighter pilot, taking him to stratospheric heights of cool. And he wore Aviators. Didn’t all the cool kids? Well, they did now. The brand saw a 40 per cent rise in sales in the seven months following the release of the film.

Aviator sales took a dip in the 90s but classic style eventually won out. Noughties

Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise are two of the many stars who are fans of the iconic design.



Ray-Ban Aviator TECH, £165, page 72

A-listers such as Johnny Depp, Brad Pitt, Paul McCartney, Steven Tyler and Kanye West were pictured or filmed wearing Aviators. In 2010, renowned music photographer, Kevin Cummings, shot iconic rock stars like Iggy Pop wearing various models from the style’s history. At the same time, new innovations were combining the classic shape with the latest sunglass design developments. Today, the Aviator TECH has the classic teardrop shape and double-brow bar in a revolutionary light-weight carbon fibre frame. They might not be made specifically for airmen anymore, but Ray-Ban Aviators are still flying high.