

## **How the relevance of leather Jackets is as robust as the material itself**

*The garment retains its appeal through decades and well into the modern fashion landscape.*

In the age of social media and a wildfire of ‘fashion influencing’, dressing trends are in and out of the door in a matter of weeks. Luckily for those of us who aren’t willing and able to revamp their closet every new moon, there are a few items of clothing that rival the colours black and white on the timelessness front. If you live in a place that sees colder days, you’re likely to have this article of clothing somewhere in your wardrobe regardless of your demographic. The article in question is, lo and behold, the leather jacket.

Incepted in the early 1900s in the United States, this wardrobe staple found its origin in military wear as an aviation jacket made for pilots fighting in the First World War. In this time period, leather jackets were specialised to protect the aviation personnel because the cockpits in the planes were uninsulated and open-air. The jacket was also called a bomber jacket, owing to (you guessed it) the nature of jobs carried out by US army pilots in the war.

Soon after, the jacket was introduced as a fashion garment to civilians by Irving Schott, who modified the appearance and functionality of the jacket to replace buttons with zippers. His version called Perfecto was designed for day-to-day use, with an asymmetrical look and a double-breasted cutin, cut and sewn in a way that enabled motorcyclists to lean over their bikes with ease. This aspect of its design immediately rendered it a big hit among bikers.

From here on is where the leather jacket ascended into the pop culture paradigm, starting to make its mark on the generations to come. The first step was the silver screen, with movies like *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without A Cause* featuring Irving Schott's original designs and inspiring the genesis of the 'bad boy' archetype. The next voyage for the leather jacket was through the world of music, where Steve McQueen or the 'King of Pop', along with The Beatles made the leather jacket a signature look. A mere garment had now blossomed into the hallmark of culture and the 'cool'.

The jacket would've only half prospered if it wasn't for its androgynous charm. By the 1970s, the outfit had gained significant ground with female pop singers like Blondie and Joan Jett, further amplifying the 'rebellious' allure of the jacket. However, the garment being worn on TV shows like *Happy Days* and groups like NSYNC and Backstreet Boys, the association of the leather jacket with rebellion watered down. Instead, aesthetics like grunge took over. The leather jacket now had a softer edge to it.

With that being said, the leather jacket is an ode to the tumults of fashion and culture over decades. It has varied in style, purpose, attached connotations and communities, but it has always been an instrument of expression. The jacket maintains its emanation of self-confidence and strength of character. Above all, the aspect of the garment that maintains its relevance even today is that its wearer has the power to shape its narrative.