



Bentley Boys

The *fabulous* **Bentley** *Boys*
A dashing photographic homage to the daring, aristocratic rakes of Roaring Twenties British motoring.

art director **timothy everest** stylist **stacey cotter** photography **munster**

Double-breasted charcoal chalk-striped wool flannel suit, Anderson & Sheppard; Light raspberry bi-coloured Prince of Wales shirt with high-stand collar and French cuffs, Tom Ford; Raspberry driving gloves with navy details, Dunhill.

1926 3-4 1/2 litre Bentley (Thanks to Fiskens founder Gregor Fiskens, the Kensington-based historic racing car specialist, for the loan of his own Bentley.)



Poudrier Train Bleu, a pillbox created by Van Cleef & Arpels for Bentley Boy Woolf Barnato to commemorate his victory over 'Le Train Bleu'.

f the Twenties roared, it was the Bentley Boys who helped ignite that flighty decade's firepower. They were a bunch of wild, fabulously wealthy devil-may-carers, united by a love of insouciance, elegant tailoring, and a need for speed, who established Bentley's reputation by revving their sports models past the winning posts of 24 Hours of Le Mans — the world's most famous endurance race — on four straight occasions between 1927 and 1930. And while they might have been the celebrities of their day — a 'Rat Pack' with the right stuff — they were old-school amateurs who competed not for ever-more-lucrative endorsement opportunities, but out of bravado and the thrill of the chase. Mixing Savile Row finery with their racing greens, the word 'rakish' could have been coined for them. "In the public's eyes," reminisced the marque's founder Walter Owen Bentley, "they had expensive Mayfair flats, kept several mistresses, owned fleets of fast Bentleys, and drank the best champagne in nightclubs; they played the horses and the Stock Exchange and, of course, won death-defying motor races. Of at least several of them, this was not such an inaccurate picture."

The Bentley Boys' ethos is embodied in their unofficial leader, Woolf 'Babe' Barnato. He inherited a South African diamond mining fortune at the age of two, and was an officer in the Royal Field Artillery in World War I and, later, a first-class cricketer for Surrey, before agreeing to finance Bentley's business. After assuming chairmanship in 1925, he went on to become a legendary racer, scoring a hat trick of Le Mans wins and wagering £100 that his Bentley Speed Six coupe would get back to London from Cannes before the much-lauded *Le Train Bleu* made its journey from the Riviera to the Channel (and indeed, he parked outside the Conservative Club in St. James four minutes before the sleek loco pulled into Calais). Barnato first synthesised Dubonnet and calvados into a concoction that is today still known as the fearsome Bentley Cocktail, and Ardenrun, his house in Surrey that many thought trumped the Savoy Hotel in décor splendour, was the scene of hearty bacchanals that outdid Le Mans in duration and derring-do. On one occasion, Brooklands-style racing pits were constructed along the quarter-mile gravel drive, and guests in powerful cars, accessorised with the requisite decorative flappers, tore into the "pits" for champagne served by waiters clad in linen helmets and goggles. Barnato himself could drink two bottles of champagne with no visible effect.

As for Barnato's retinue — those roisterers that the romance novelist Dame Barbara Cartland would recall, decades later, as "great drivers and even better dancers" — there was Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin, the beneficiary of a lace manufacturing fortune and the playboy of the pack, "the greatest British driver of his day and equally furious off the track, with his abundance and wide variety of girlfriends," according to W. O. Bentley; Glen Kidston, a handsome, impeccably turned-out former submarine captain "who seemed drawn to hair-raising escapades of every possible kind — naval, sporting and social"; and Dr J. Dudley 'Benjy' Benjafield, a leading bacteriologist who was known to the team as 'The Bald Chemist'. In fact, there were at least 12 core Bentley Boys, but the scene gravitated around Grosvenor and Berkeley Squares in Mayfair. Barnato, Birkin and Kidston took adjacent flats in the south-east corner of Grosvenor Square (some cabbies still refer to this spot as "Bentley Corner"), while Benjafield's old residence at No. 28 Berkeley Square is now the louche club Morton's; Bentley Boy photos and memorabilia, including a Terence Cuneo painting depicting Barnato's duel with *Le Train Bleu*, adorn the walls. Former Bentley Boy Jack Barclay opened a Bentley showroom that still bears his name on Berkeley Square's east side. And if you listen closely on a still, sultry night, you might hear the ghostly roar of Barnato & Co.'s Blower Bentleys vying to beat their unofficial lap records around both Squares — an echo of those far-off, more innocent, and infinitely more dashing days. ❧

by **stuart husband**





On Mark:
Double-breasted black embroidered velvet smoking jacket with shawl collar, black grosgrain silk bow-tie, silk pocket square in cream, silver and mother-of-pearl dress studs, and silver knot cufflinks, all Anderson & Sheppard; Piqué-front white dress shirt, Timothy Everest; Vintage Portofino hand-wound wristwatch, IWC.

On Sarah Ann:
Reversible peach-and-teal vintage silk dressing gown, courtesy of Carlo Manzi; Vintage pearl necklace, stylist's own.



Reversible peach-and-teal vintage silk dressing gown, courtesy of Carlo Manzi; Vintage pearl necklace, stylist's own.



On Sebastian: Plum velvet shawl-collared smoking jacket, wool/silk blend barathea midnight blue dress trousers, self-dot plum concealed front shirt with Albany collar and turn back cuff, silk pocket square in plum/acid dogtooth and silk black grosgrain bowtie, Timothy Everest; Windshield pipe circa 1904, courtesy of the Alfred Dunhill Museum & Archive.

On Mark: Velvet embroidered black double-breasted shawl-collared smoking jacket, grosgrain silk black bow-tie, silk pocket square in cream, Anderson & Sheppard; Piqué-front white dress shirt, Timothy Everest; Alessandro lace-up shoes in black, Berluti.



On Sebastian:
Single-breasted virgin wool grey flannel two-piece suit, Anderson & Sheppard; White self-dot concealed-front Mayfair shirt, Timothy Everest; Charcoal grey silk cashmere tie and silk pocket square with poppy circle design, both Tom Ford; Emerson cocobolo tortoiseshell spectacles, Oliver Peoples; Palomar blue/green leather lace-up shoes, Berluti.

On Sarah Ann:
Printed light blue silk and brown canvas sleeveless dress with fringe detail, Alberta Ferretti; Vintage feather netted headpiece, vintage pearl necklace, and anthracite silk socks, all stylist's own; Suede leather platform open-toe sandals with tassel ankle straps, Louis Vuitton.

On Mark:
Single-breasted grey virgin wool glen-plaid three-piece suit, Anderson & Sheppard; Charcoal herringbone shirt with button-down collar, Timothy Everest; Blue wool and silk tartan tie, Tom Ford; Silk pocket square with yellow geometric design, Dunhill; Fil d'Ariane grey/black leather lace-up shoes, Berluti.



On Mark:
Wool and silk blend barathea three-piece dinner suit with shawl collar, and black grosgrain silk braces with leather tabs, both Timothy Everest; Dress shirt with detachable wing collar, and black grosgrain silk bow-tie, both Anderson & Sheppard; Platinum and white diamond crease dress studs, and platinum and white diamond crease cufflinks, both Guy & Max.

On Sarah Ann:
Silk sleeveless long dress, Alberta Ferretti; Felted wool vintage hat, circa 1930, courtesy of Carlo Manzi; Crystal and silver vintage brooch worn on hat, and silver plait bracelet, stylist's own.

On Sebastian:
Virgin wool peak-lapel tartan dinner jacket and matching horseshoe-front waistcoat, midnight blue wool and silk blend barathea dress trousers, and waffle-weave dress shirt with wing collar, and black grosgrain silk bow-tie, all Timothy Everest; Silk pocket square in cream, Anderson & Sheppard.





On Sebastian:
 Double-breasted charcoal chalk-striped wool flannel suit, and silk pocket square in cream, both Anderson & Sheppard; Light raspberry bi-coloured Prince of Wales shirt with high-stand collar and French cuffs, Tom Ford; Chartreuse geometric Duke of Windsor tie and silver dome cufflinks, both Timothy Everest; Raspberry driving gloves with navy details, Dunhill.

On Sarah Ann:
 Beige rabbit fur and leather helmet, MaxMara; Vintage fox fur shawl, stylist's own.

On Mark:
 Double-breasted orange silk linen hopsack peak-lapel jacket, and rose silk canvas sport trousers, both Tom Ford; White Mayfair shirt with double cuffs, Timothy Everest; White deerskin leather dress gloves, Anderson & Sheppard; Silk pocket square with yellow geometric design worn as a neckerchief, Dunhill.



Olive cotton gingham shirt with high-stand cutaway collar and French cuffs, Tom Ford; Vintage hand-wound Pilot's Watch, IWC; World War II RAF flying goggles, Halcyon (www.classicpartsltd.com); Motorities leather coat, 'Distameter', Unique lighter-watch, Windshield pipe circa 1904, all courtesy of the Alfred Dunhill Museum & Archive.



Single-breasted light brown worsted wool three-button blazer with elbow patches, Polo Ralph Lauren; Olive cotton gingham shirt with high-stand cutaway collar and French cuffs, silk canvas trousers in cream (part of a single-breasted peak-lapel two-piece suit), and silk pocket square with abstract ebony and yellow polka-dot design, all Tom Ford; Brown and gold silk Duke of Windsor tie, Timothy Everest; Antique aviator goggles with brown leather trim and hand-made brown leather gauntlets, both Halcyon (www.classicpartstid.com).



On Mark:
Motorities double-breasted full-length leather coat, circa early 1900s, courtesy of the Alfred Dunhill Museum & Archive; Olive cotton gingham shirt with high-stand cutaway collar and French cuffs, Tom Ford; Antique aviator goggles with brown leather trim and hand-made brown leather helmet, both Halcyon (www.classicpartsltd.com).

On Sarah Ann:
Men's camel cotton vintage boiler suit, courtesy of Carlo Manzi; Mark 49 tan leather goggles and hand-made white leather helmet worn backwards, both Halcyon (www.classicpartsltd.com); Leather and knit backed gloves, property of Fiskens.



Men's camel cotton vintage boiler suit and vintage plaited leather belt, both courtesy of Carlo Manzi; Mark 49 tan leather goggles and hand-made white leather helmet worn backwards, both Halcyon (www.classicpartstid.com); Vintage pearl necklace, stylist's own; Leather and knit backed gloves, property of Fiskens; Tan studded shoes, MaxMara; Rose-pink dry knee-high socks, Tabio.



Motorities double-breasted short leather jacket, circa early 1900s, courtesy of the Alfred Dunhill Museum & Archive; Beige cashmere and silk scarf, Dunhill; Flat-front wool and silk ebony tweed overcheck Spencer pants, rose-pink monochrome overcheck shirt with high-stand collar and French cuffs, Tom Ford; Single-breasted navy cardigan, Polo Ralph Lauren; World War II RAF flying goggles, Halcyon (www.classicpartstid.com); Vintage hand-wound Pilot's Watch, IWC.



On Sebastian:
Wool and silk ebony tweed overcheck country jacket with leather buttons and suede elbow patches, flat-front wool and silk ebony tweed overcheck Spencer pants, rose-pink monochrome overcheck shirt with high-stand collar and French cuffs, and olive silk knit tie, all Tom Ford; Single-breasted navy cardigan, Polo Ralph Lauren; World War II RAF flying goggles, Halcyon (www.classicpartstid.com); Pink silk pocket square, Dunhill; Windshield pipe, circa 1904, courtesy of the Alfred Dunhill Museum & Archive.

On Sarah Ann:
Camel hair belted coat, MaxMara; Men's camel cotton vintage boiler suit and vintage plaited leather belt, both courtesy of Carlo Manzi; Mark 49 tan leather goggles and hand-made white leather helmet worn backwards, both Halcyon (www.classicpartstid.com); Vintage pearl necklace, stylist's own; Leather and knit backed gloves, property of Fiskens.

On Mark:
Single-breasted light brown worsted wool three-button blazer with elbow patches, Polo Ralph Lauren; Olive cotton gingham shirt with high-stand cutaway collar and French cuffs, silk canvas trousers in cream (part of a single-breasted peak-lapel two-piece suit), and silk pocket square with abstract ebony and yellow polka-dot design, all Tom Ford; Brown and gold silk Duke of Windsor tie, Timothy Everest; Antique aviator goggles with brown leather trim and hand-made brown leather gauntlets, both Halcyon (www.classicpartstid.com).

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