



Gift Guide: Automotive apparel for all seasons

By JAN TEGLER on 11/30/2010



From the earliest days of motoring, the relationship between automobiles and apparel has been symbiotic. Clothing worn by Brass Era car and motorcycle buffs was adopted mostly to protect drivers from the elements, rather than from the hazards of speed. Floor-length dusters, motoring coats and driving caps shielded motorists from cold wind and choking dust.

As open runabouts gave way to closed-top tourers in the 1920s, driving fashion flowered. Gentlemen and ladies of the day were free to sport stylish attire without worrying about the rigors of top-down travel.

Apparel for motorcyclists spawned a genre of its own with the embrace of two-wheeler fashion (leather jackets, pants, motorcycle boots, gloves) by the wider public. Racing drivers employed the leather helmets and goggles used by aviators and specialized gloves for steering their rakish racing cars. By the early postwar era, clothing designed specifically for racing began to appear.

Today, fashions for street and track overlap, and opportunities abound to indulge in apparel

influenced by the automobile. Here are fast and fashionable options from two big names, Alpinestars and Suixtil.

Alpinestars

Worn by the likes of four- and two-wheel stars Michael Schumacher, Jimmie Johnson, Allan McNish, Ben Spies, Nicky Hayden and "Top Gear's" "The Stig," Alpinestars is now a fixture in race wear for the track, a top name in automotive fashion for the street and a player in action-sports-based fashions. The Italian company began as a maker of ski and hiking boots in 1963, but by the 1990s, it had branched out into motorcycle gear for competition and road riding. Visit www.alpinestars.com for more.

-- Velocity Leather Jacket: Retro styling combines with modern safety and comfort in this striking full-grain leather jacket. Removable CE-certified Bio Armor elbow and shoulder protectors and PE padding in the chest and back offer premium protection. Available in black-orange or dark indigo-red cream, this jacket shouts style (\$500).

-- Frontier Gore-Tex Jacket: If you're going to have only one motorcycle jacket, this might be the one. With the versatility of its multiple layers and exhaust ports, the attractive and waterproof Frontier Gore-Tex Jacket adapts to a wide temperature range, from summer heat to the changing conditions of fall and winter (\$700).

-- WR-V Gore-Tex Gloves: The velour-lined gloves are perfect for commuting or touring. Breathable and 100 percent waterproof, these roomy textile gloves keep hands warm and dry in the worst conditions (\$130).

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Suixtil

Founded in Argentina in the 1930s, Suixtil lays claim to being the first clothing manufacturer to design clothes specifically for racing drivers. Well known as a maker of fine men's and women's clothing by the time the brand's founder staked Juan Manuel Fangio in the Chevrolets that he drove to become Argentine national champion in the early 1940s, Suixtil designed uniforms for the Argentine racing team (the "Armada") that traveled to Europe to contest the Formula One and Formula Two championships in 1948.

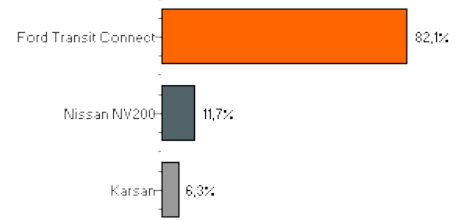
The specialized Argentine-blue trousers and yellow polos made famous by Fangio and other members of the Armada were soon adopted by a raft of other period racing greats, from Stirling Moss to Masten Gregory. Defunct by the 1960s, Suixtil was relaunched in 2007. With its Heritage line as anchor, the maker faithfully re-creates original racing clothes from its heyday. Go to www.suixtil.com to find out more. Here are some selections:

-- Monaco Bomber Jacket: Fangio himself can be seen wearing this stylish period jacket in pictures from the early 1950s at the Monaco GP, the Belgian GP and Goodwood. Made from a washable cotton-mix fabric, this distinctive two-pocket jacket is perfect for the fall/winter season (\$260).

-- Targa Pima Polo: Italian ace Luigi Musso was among many drivers who favored Suixtil's dashing Targa Pima polos. He cuts a fine figure in the long-sleeve, fully knitted sweater in photos from the 1955 running of the Mille Miglia. Made of premium pima cotton and embroidered with the Suixtil logo, the polo comes in forest green or steel blue (\$95).

--Modena Race Pants: In Suixtil's original design, these light Argentine-blue cotton twill pants have tapered legs and large pockets (\$160).

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