

fashion

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asos.comTrousers, £59.99,
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Goodbye, skinny trousers. Hello, Hepburn pants

High-waisted, wide-legged trousers are in. Don't panic, says **Harriet Walker**

If you have ever suspected that most fashion trends are for the very tall and very thin, I'm afraid the street-style set's new favourite look will do little to persuade you otherwise. The vogue among the A-list and the Insta pack is for a style of high-waisted, wide-leg slacks known among fashion editors as "Hepburn trousers", after their most famous wearer (Katharine, not Audrey).

She wore hers with chic silk blouses, starchy men's shirts with their collars popped, naturally, and androgynous blazers (my, she was yar). She accompanied them with brogues, tennis shoes and heels, and an unerring sense of effortlessness. In my experience, this style of trousers requires near-constant attention — have they caught on my heel? Are they dragging along the ground behind me? — so much so that Vetements' version comes with a little cut-out hole to slip your stiletto through to avoid tripping or tearing.

One doubts whether Hepburn put so much thought into it.

Victoria Beckham has long been a fan of the look and includes several pairs in most of her catwalk collections. Gigi Hadid wore some on the red carpet recently, as did Charlize Theron and Rachel McAdams. The actress Olivia Wilde is a repeat offender, but I'm all too aware that this list might not do anything to change your mind on whether they work in real life.

At fashion week — also not real life, I know — they came in vibrant shades of yellow and red, as well as neutral khaki and impressively spotless white; as casual, paper bag-waist chinos or sharply tailored as part of a trouser suit; in a slouchy, mannish fit or nipped in at the waist to give a classically feminine corset effect. In short, they were styled according to every taste, worn formally and casually, for day and for night, so if you can find the right pair, they are the sort of thing that



Victoria Beckham

Emma Willis in top, £35;
trousers, £42, next.co.uk

comes in quite handy. Yet can you wear them if you're under 6ft 2in?

Yes, says the stylist and body-mapping expert Anna Berkeley. "If you're short, don't go too full with the fabric or it will make you look shorter," she counsels. "High waists are fine on petites, as long as it's right for your proportions. So if you have shorter legs and a long torso, go for it, but always add heels."

"Height definitely helps," says *Vogue's* fashion features editor, Ellie Pithers. "Shorter women should consider where the cuff hits the ankle — at the skinniest point for maximum flattery. A crisp front pleat can slim the thighs

too. And keep things lightweight up top to avoid a muffin top."

As with so many "statement styles", Hepburn trousers require a bit of planning, but once you get the hang of them, they will become a regular in your wardrobe. I have a pair that are so comfy I think of them as jogging bottoms for the office.

First, are you prepared to wear heels with them? Most people find this style requires a little boost, otherwise you can look a bit swamped. You want the trouser legs to drop cleanly, with no bunching at the bottom. Ankle boots will work now, then strappy sandals in summer.

If you're firmly flat-footed, all is not lost — consider wearing your Hepburns with thick-soled trainers, as I do. You just need enough lift so your hems don't pool on the



Katharine Hepburn

ground; Katharine would not approve of a soggy cuff.

Where to look? My first stop would be Zara, which has plenty of options, from summery linen beige to more heavy-duty utilitarian green khakis (£29.99 and £39.99, both zara.com). I also like Topshop Boutique's black satin pair (£85, topshop.com) and Finery's, which come in a navy satin and work well with boots (£79, finerylondon.com). Arket's wide fluid wool trousers in black are the real Hepburn deal (£99, arket.com), but it is Me + Em's Transformer trousers that scoop the prize — at £189, they're not cheap, but they are versatile. They can be worn full-length (and they come up long), but can also be turned up and popped with a handy press-stud for a cropped look — voilà, two looks in one (meandem.com).

Pithers, a willowy Hepburn type, recommends Uniqlo's dark green canvas take, in the sale for £19.90 (uniqlo.com), while other editors were in Ulla Johnson's pink corduroy pair (£300, net-a-porter.com, and close to sold out). For the less rangy and those who can't quite face the full Katharine (I hear you), there's no shame in opting for a cropped version. Cos's belted paper bag culottes are a versatile way in (£69, cosstores.com), as are Topshop's casual tie-waist style, which comes in a range of shades (£29, topshop.com).

I'm sure that many of you will remain unconvinced, and I understand why. Before people asked which *Sex and the City* character you were most like, it was which Hepburn — for the Audrey's among you, there'll be LBDs aplenty on these pages very soon.

Is she ever going to take that blue coat off? By Harriet Walker

Of the many peripheral players making the most of the Brexit chaos to soak up some extra limelight, there is only one you wouldn't mind taking home with you. Sturdy, pragmatic, a classic light blue — no, not Ken Clarke: Theresa May's coat.

At a time when her party seems to have left her out in the cold, the prime minister has never looked cosier. She might be remembered for having lost a majority in the House of Commons, but she has doubled her presence in the cloakroom. There are those saying privately that May's £750 tailored wool coat, with its removable puffer layer, may yet prove to be the most high-functioning member of the cabinet. It has certainly had more staying power than any of her Brexit ministers.

The garment in question is known in fashion circles as a twofer and is by the Italian label Herno, a brand that the Duchess of Sussex has also worn and which specialises in precisely the sort of trans-Alpine outdoorsy glamour that makes British people suspicious. Why should the important business of staying warm be complicated by anything so frivolous as looking good, you might ask. It's a tricky balance to strike — this proud nation once demonised a man for a donkey jacket he didn't even wear.

Admittedly, £750 is a lot to spend on a coat — even on two coats — but factor in every fashion editor's favourite formula, the cost per wear, and the price (divided by the number of times worn) becomes a little less eye-watering. May has worn her twofer to church in Aylesbury, to PMQs, in Brussels and in Strasbourg. It has accompanied her to the indicative votes, the alternative votes and the no-confidence votes. I've counted her wearing it no fewer than 20 times — that's £37.50 per wear at the very most, even before you consider that this coat might just be May's only friend. What price constancy?

If people tend to end up looking like their dogs, perhaps they also take on the qualities of the



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clothes they wear the most. What is May's twofer but a coat that is recognisably less useful than one you already have, only with a built-in backstop? What does her having another of the same style, but in black, say about her ability to look beyond the deal, I mean coat, that is on the table?

Maybe that's unfair. May has spent her premiership trying to marry expectations with reality, and this coat is the very embodiment of compromise. The fact is, once you have decided on and bought a winter coat with short, bracelet sleeves, it is difficult to go back to the shop and ask for a long extension because your wrists are cold. That's why it makes sense to have another, more sensible layer — often known as a Stamer — to fall back on and deploy only when you can no longer feel your hands.

It's a sign of chronic news overload when viewers are as familiar with the wardrobes of power as they are with its corridors, but the outerwear of Laura Kuenssberg et al has become a regular fixture on our screens during the process of taking back control — more regular than the leader of the opposition, in fact. Mark my words, these coats will be part of history: future generations will marvel not only at the omnishambles, but also at how we used to have winters, as they sit sweating in the desert that was once Grimsby.

Watch May's coat carefully over the next few days, for it may yet be the harbinger of Brexit: will she remove the insulating layer or double (goose) down after her trip to Brussels?

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