

PEDAL-PUSHERS

Designers and influencers are taking bike shorts for a spin this season, but are they here to stay?

By JULIA SEIDL

SURE, I WORE bike shorts when I was 12—didn't we all? But I laughed when I saw cycling shorts on Off-White c/o Virgil Abloh's spring/summer 2018 runway over a year ago. Naomi Campbell—who is notably not a Tour de France competitor—closed the show in a white knee-length pair as a nod to Virgil Abloh's seasonal muse Princess Diana and her gym gear of choice. Post-Abloh, bike shorts were all over the sculpted thighs of the influencers and models on my Instagram feed, including a Baldwin (now a Bieber), a Jenner and a Hadid—the trifecta of trendsetters. Despite these A-list endorsements, I wrote the look off as a fad, certain that it would exist for one season only and was not worthy of my time or money. Shortly after, though, bike shorts showed up in my fashion-forward



office on a stylish PR pro who paired them with Balenciaga dad sneakers and a sharply tailored black blazer. Then came the spring/summer 2019 collections. Everyone from the old guards at Chanel and Fendi to contemporary superstars like Acne Studios and Jacquemus did a take on Lycra legs. And now it's trickling down to fast fashion—Zara is even doing a leopard-print pair. It seems I can no longer categorize bicycle shorts as a flash-in-the-pan fad. They were, after all, one of Karl Lagerfeld's final endorsements.

Now, as I consider buying my first pair of bike shorts since 1993, I'm puzzling over how something I was so quick to write off a year ago is now a piece I consider crucial to my closet. What separates bike shorts from, say, blink-and-you-may-miss-it fads like trucker hats and platform flip-

flops? The fact that they've been around this long is one indication, according to Henrik Vejlggaard, a Copenhagen-based trend sociologist and author of the book *Anatomy of a Trend*. Vejlggaard says it comes down to who is wearing the look and for how long. "A fad is a new design that is very popular in a small circle for about one season," he says. But a full-blown trend? That goes mainstream and lasts, on average, about three years.

Timing is, indeed, everything. Bike shorts wouldn't have blown up if they had hit the runways five to 10 years earlier. Both pop culture (see last October's Jonah Hill dramedy *Mid90s* and the remakes of '90s series, from *Full House* to *Will & Grace*) and the fashion industry at large are obsessed with '90s nostalgia. Last fall, Marc Jacobs re-released his now-iconic spring/summer 1993 Grunge collection for Perry Ellis (the very items that got him fired from the house).

The spring/summer 2019 runways brought us '90s staples, including cargo pants at Sies Marjan and Prabal Gurung as well as square toes at Erdem and Roberto Cavalli—not to mention the stonewash jeans and slip dresses that are still going strong after several seasons. And for his fall/winter 2019 show, Tom Ford returned to the sexy suiting that had made him a household name during his mid-'90s reign at Gucci. That nostalgia had peppered his past few shows. "There are a lot of '90s things floating around fashion right now, and I thought, 'Well, I know how to do that,'" he cheekily told the Associated Press following the showing of his spring/summer 2018 collection.

Though millennials might fondly remember bike shorts from their elementary-school days and Gen Zs are wearing them for the first time, the reality is that all generations are dressing in a time when the fashion mood is very casual. As the athleisure movement brought leggings out of the gym and sneakers into the office, mixing luxury with sportswear no longer raises eyebrows. (You can thank Stella McCartney—she pioneered early collaborations with Adidas and designer Phoebe Philo, who always wore Stan Smiths out onto the Celine runway—for starting the wave.) So maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised that bike shorts would be next. After all, Kim Kardashian wore a black pair, along with strappy velvet Gianvito Rossi heels and a studded Enfants Riches Déprimés leather jacket, all the way back in the summer of 2016. Fashion search engine Lyst even cites Kim K. as one of the reasons behind a 78-percent increase in bike-short sales in 2018 (lest we forget that every trend needs a celeb endorsement or two).

While it's unlikely that bike shorts will become a timeless closet staple, they, like their '90s style sister the fanny pack, have staying power and will continue to evolve as a trend as designers get creative. So I don't have to feel bad about skipping bicycle shorts last summer—there is still plenty of time to slip on a pair. Now the only question that remains is, Should I go for basic black or animal print? ♦