

A JACKET WITH ALTITUDE



Josh Sims, author of *Icons of Men's Style*, makes the case for why the military-grade B-15 jacket is taking flight again

Pilots weren't that keen on the B-15 when it was first introduced as official US Army Air Force kit in 1944 **1** – after all, it did away with the much-loved, smart and sexy (if heavyweight) leather bomber jackets then typically worn by any flyboy worth his 'chute.

But what they came to admire, perhaps resentfully, is what makes the B-15 work so well to this present day: its sheer practicality. If architect Louis Sullivan's famed "form follows function" dictum was applied to a jacket, this is what you'd get: a 'blouson' fit that's cropped but loose around the body (allowing for ease of movement); a zip-up fastening (so draught-free); ribbed cuffs and hem (ditto); a nylon-blend fabric (washable, hard-wearing); a quilted pile filling (super-warm but light); a storage space on the left arm (for pens); two hand-warmer pockets (for, er, hand-warming); and, most characteristically, a wool collar (to keep chilly winds at bay).

Indeed, the original, military-spec B-15 was designed to keep wearers warm at temperatures as low as -10°C. You don't get that with a Harrington. This was a modern jacket for the new jet age – and for Marilyn Monroe, who wore one throughout her morale-boosting tour of the Korean battlefield.

Contemporary versions – from the likes of Canada Goose, Schott and even Alpha

Industries, one of the original military contractors – are updated further **2**. The heavy wool collar is now typically synthetic 'fur', the outer a dressier dark-coloured matte cotton, while the chest tabs for oxygen mask tubing are hardly necessary in rush hour. Well, not that often. It's this update-but-don't-mess approach that leaves the B-15 so wearable. Inherently casual, it's all you need over a T-shirt and jeans **3**, even in the snow, but the confluence of formal and military means it even works over a suit. A two-piece suit, that is; it's always looked at home over a flying suit.



THE B-15 PASSES ITS TIMELESS STYLE EXAM WITH FLYING COLOURS

01

YEAGER BOMBER

WW2 fighter pilot Chuck Yeager wore the B-15 in 1947, when he became the first man to break the sound barrier. He wasn't preoccupied with whether the style was in or not.



02

HIGH FASHION

For its autumn/winter 2014 'runway' show, Calvin Klein Collection had a fresh take on the flight jacket in both traditional olive drab and slightly less drab camel: more versatile and cosier than ever due to the removable body warmer.



03

FLIGHT CREW

This is a modernised but still recognisable B-15 by American civilian-wear brand J Crew, with a display of how to team it. It looks best with rugged fabrics – a chambray shirt, denim jeans, a chunky knit – but it isn't so unrefined that it won't also fly with a tie.



WORDS: JAMIE MILLAR | PHOTOGRAPHY: MARTHA PAVLIDOU AT HEARST STUDIOS | STYLING: ERIC DOWN | JACKET: F336 BLAUER BAG LIGHTNING EJECTION SEAT: £17,500 INTREPID-DESIGN.CO.UK