

Dr Martens

In step with generations of youth cultures



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CoolBrands



The Dr Martens brand heritage and deep association with youth culture lies at the core of its appeal. An association that comes, not from advertising or marketing, but from a genuine connection with young people who have adopted the boot, and the brand, as their own for generations.

As the progeny of two German families – Funck and Maertens – the brand was originally developed to alleviate the discomfort experienced after a skiing accident. Together with an English shoe family, Griggs, they created the recognisable bulbous shape with distinctive yellow stitching and grooved sole that still defines the brand today.

On April 1st 1960 the very first Dr Martens boot rolled off the production line at the Griggs factory in Northamptonshire; taking its name from the date of its inception, the classic eight-hole, 1460 (with air-cushioned sole) was born. Designed to be durable, functional and tough it was soon adopted by British workers, from the docks to the postal service to the police, quickly becoming a mainstay of the British working classes.

The 1960s proved to be a decade of new ideas, cultural upheaval, flamboyant fashion, and ultimately, social revolution. Against this backdrop – and perhaps surprisingly given its functional nature – the brand found itself resonating with the upsurge in youth culture. It was through the fragmentation of ‘mods’ in the early 1960s that the boot was

first adopted by youth groups, spawning a subculture that became synonymous with DM’s: skinheads.

Proud of their working class roots, and repulsed by the rise of flowerpower and free-love, skinheads celebrated the everyday work-wear of the proletariat. Shorn hair and heavy boots became their defining characteristics but it took a strange quirk of fate – the addition of steel toecaps – for their allegiance to switch to Dr Martens. Now classed as ‘offensive weapons’ the brand’s desirability escalated.

Whilst skinheads valued Dr Martens for their utilitarian design, anti-fashion statement and comfort, the attention they paid to their appearance has been overlooked. Hot-knifing, over-polishing, fake-ageing and colour-coordinating were all methods skinheads adopted to customise their boots. This has since proved to be one of the defining characteristics of Dr Martens. In fact, the brand set a precedent as one of the first to be customised and personalised as a means of expressing individuality and creativity, which it continues to do to this day.

The brand is still being adopted by various subcultures with successive generations and is frequently linked with music – from ska to industrial rock and grunge to Britpop. Pete Townshend of The Who was the first ‘celebrity’ to be seen wearing ‘Doc’s’ and also wrote the song ‘Uniform’ about them. Many other bands and famous names have been seen wearing Dr Martens since, including current owners, Keith Richards, John Galliano and Johnny Depp. It’s a testament to the true popularity of the brand that the company has never paid for celebrity endorsement. Instead, the brand’s success is attributed to a grass roots, peer-to-peer phenomenon, rather than overt marketing.

Dr Martens – or Doc Martens, Doc’s or DM’s – has come a long way from its work-wear origins, today offering a broad range of boots, shoes and sandals, for men, women and children. But it is still for its iconic 1460 boot and association with successive subcultures that it continues to be most widely known and respected.

