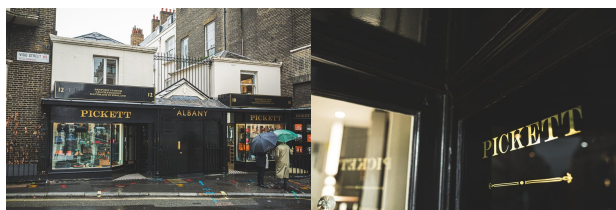


CLASSIC DRIVER

Talking cars, craftsmanship and Campagnolo hubs with Trevor Pickett

Lead

Since the launch of Pickett London in 1988, the quintessential English eccentric Trevor Pickett has been at the avantgarde of British luxury. We visited him at his London store in Burlington Gardens to learn more about his passion for cars and craftsmanship.



For a man who professes to have little more than a passing interest in four wheels, Trevor Pickett's choice of motors has been eclectic, to say the least. His first car was an ostentatiously-styled Ford Consul Classic gifted by his aunt and uncle (and written-off by another, less observant learner driver); he continued to prepare for his test by wafting around the streets of London in a friend's Bristol 411; bought himself an MG Magnette at the age of 20; chose a MKI Fiat Panda 4X4 in which to make a weekly, two-hour drive to the country 'because he liked the bull-bar' – and currently owns a MINI Clubman that he bought after a test drive in which the accompanying salesman was required to change gear on his behalf.

"I suddenly realised I've become too used to an automatic," explains the ebullient owner of the eponymous Pickett stores which, during the past 32 years, have established a world-wide reputation as places to go for the best of British leather goods and accessories. And it has been as much the man behind the brand as the high quality of its merchandise that has led to the firm's success.



Pickett, 58, had his first introduction to retail while still a schoolboy. "My father was a keen racing cyclist who owned a bicycle shop in Benfleet, Essex, near where I grew up. Every day, from the age of seven, I would stop-by at the shop on the way from school. Without realising it, I slowly learned all about the nuances of tubular tyres, Campagnolo hubs and Shimano derailleur gears as a result of watching my dad build beautiful Holdsworth and Claud Butler-framed bikes to special order," he recalls.

After leaving school at 16, Pickett took a job at the Army and Navy stores where he was soon asked to stand-in when the manager of the bicycle department went on holiday. "As soon as I saw the way everything was displayed, I knew it was a disaster - so I completely re-vamped everything with the result that sales took-off dramatically. It gave me a great insight into the importance of presentation and made me realise that my interest lay in specialist, quality products, where the purveyor has a depth of knowledge.



Pickett was able to put that insight to good use in 1980, when he went to work at the Unicorn leather Company in Mayfair's Burlington Arcade, a business that he was able to buy when the owner's waning interest led to him putting it up for sale eight years later. "Unicorn had established an enviable reputation for its high quality leather belts and briefcases, but the owner just didn't want to carry on with it - so, with the help of some other investors, I was able to buy it, change the name to Pickett and set about expanding the offering and gaining recognition for the business around the world."

Among the many products that led to that happening were the celebrated Pickett bags made from quilted leather, and the soon-ubiquitous Pashmina scarf. "Pashminas had been made available before, but we were able to make them really take-off by combining lovely quality with affordable prices - something that has been the foundation of our philosophy from the beginning," explains Pickett.



The early success of the store helped to make it a go-to destination for celebrities, although a tradition of discretion prevents Pickett from naming some of his many high-profile customers. "I can tell you, however, that Ben Whishaw was supplied with one of our briefcases when he played Michael Banks in Mary Poppins Returns - I didn't realise until the film was released, but I'm told the props department insisted on it," says Pickett, who continued to run the Burlington Arcade store for many years before moving the business to larger premises in nearby Burlington Gardens and running it alongside a second outlet in Sloane Street, Chelsea which opened in 1997.

A visit to either shop - [or a quick glance at Pickett's presence in the Classic Driver Shop](#) - will reveal the wide range of luxurious, craftsman-made products stocked by Pickett, where it's possible to buy everything from a pair of kilim slippers to a top quality umbrella with 'greyhound head' handle. But the core of the business continues to be in the type of hand-crafted leather goods on which it was founded. From meticulously stitched briefcases to all types of wallet, from cashmere-lined gloves to ostrich-trimmed hip flasks - if it can be made from leather or trimmed in leather, Pickett will probably have it.





"We do sell items such as scarves, stoles and our kilim shoes and slippers, but the main focus is on leather goods which, wherever possible, we source from U.K. makers who use local materials - the promotion of British craftsmanship has always been key to the business, and we've established so many strong, long-standing relationships with tanneries and makers that we are able to commission objects in small batches and also have items custom-made," says Pickett.

"Those are the type of things I really enjoy offering to people, because I can explain the product, how it has been made, who by, where it has come from and why it costs, say £100, in comparison to an apparently similar object that might cost £50. It's all about quality. Good quality is a true investment."



Indeed, the bespoke side of the business is something for which Pickett has become well known - not least among classic car owners, many of whom have commissioned customised luggage sets that are designed to make optimum use of often minimal space. "If someone wants a set of car luggage, we ask them to drive to one of the stores and we measure-up the available space to the millimetre, after which we can create cases that are perfectly shaped to the vehicle so that no area is wasted," explains Pickett. "But it isn't cheap - each case costs a minimum of £1,000."

So how much for a set of weekend luggage to fit a Panda 4X4, one wonders?

Photos: Rob W. Cooper for Classic Driver © 2020

Gallery

