



Featuring frames



Aviator still flying high

Optician shows five aviator sunglasses styles to members of the public to get their opinions

The aviator sunglasses design, originally developed for the military, has stood the test of time for more than 80 years. Taking its shape from military goggles, the aviator was intended to generously cover the eye for maximum protection from the sun. Initially made famous by US Army general Douglas MacArthur, the style has evolved into an iconic fashion statement that has seen resurgence in the past few years – with countless variations in both styling and materials.

With this in mind, *Optician* selected five versions of the timeless silhouette to see what members of the public thought about the styles and their respective price points. The five models on test were a non-branded pair from a high street retailer (1), Mirage from Kirk Originals (2), Seventy Five from

Polaroid (3), 1009 from Evatik (4) and the RB3641 from Ray-Ban (5).

Before opinions were sought, participants were invited to informally select what price point they thought each sunglasses belonged to. The five options were – high street, entry-level, mid-price, designer and high end. The aim of the quiz wasn't to catch the participants out, but to get them thinking and talking about each sunglasses and its feel, build and style – along with which one was their favourite.

The male participants seemed much happier to get involved and take an in-depth look at each model. Hinge build quality tended to be the first thing they looked for – without any provocation from *Optician*. One even devised his own quality standard by judging sound when placing them on a table.

Style wins out

The plastic high street frame was the easiest to identify among the men, as was the Kirk Originals Mirage frame – for entirely different reasons. 'The white frame (high street) is the sort of rubbish you would see in a petrol station,' said one of the men. The quality of the Mirage sunglasses didn't go unnoticed, but the reasons varied from the way the colour changed as the frame moved around in the light,





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to their 'beefy' hinges and solid feel. However, not one of the interviewees said they would pay the frame's RRP, and most believed its price point would be approximately double what they expected the likes of a Ray-Ban sunglass to cost. Had the price been lower, the frame would have been more of a tempting proposition for the interviewees.

Branding influences proved to be a major factor in the way the men picked their favourite sunglass. The Ray-Ban RB3641 was chosen by *Optician* especially because of its modified aviator silhouette. The goal was to see if people gravitated towards the brand name rather than the traditional shape. That the Polaroid Seventy Five was singled out by a high proportion of interviewees was testament to how popular the style remains. 'It's the most classic frame here, you can tell by looking at the little details – it almost looks vintage,' said one of the participants. However, the general consensus was that had a classical Ray-Ban aviator frame been among the options, it would have been the preferred choice.

The frame industry's trend for subtle, or no branding at all, was lost on many of the people *Optician* quizzed. 'I wouldn't buy this frame (Kirk Originals Mirage) because there's

no branding – if I have spent a lot of money on something, I want people to know,' said one of the men.

The vox-pop's curveball came in the shape of the Evatik 1009 sunglass from Ridgway Optical. The Evatik line is the company's first foray into sunglasses and it received positive comments from some of the male participants – one even believed it was the high end price option. 'I like the colour and it has a real quality feel, but I just have no idea what the brand is,' said one of the men.

In the dark over UV

The female interviewees responded somewhat differently to the males when considering both the price point and the style itself. Fewer of the women managed to guess correctly the price point of each sunglass, something not helped by the fact that of the brands on show, only Ray-Ban was recognised. Further woe for the optical industry came from the fact that nearly all of the female participants said they would probably buy the cheapest option available. Asked if they would reconsider this choice if they knew about a recent story in the *Daily Mail* in which sunglasses from a high street retailer were claimed to be the cause of an allergic facial reaction, three-quarters said they would buy a different pair. Worry over losing the

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sunglass was another common reason for not wanting to spend a significant amount of money and many viewed sunglasses as a disposable item.

One common theme between the men and women was that quality of UV protection didn't play a role in their buying decisions.

'If I was going to buy something for UV protection, I'd buy a pair of Oakley, or a pair of sports sunglasses,' said one of the male participants. Of those that picked the high street sunglasses as their favourite, none were concerned about research from the likes of *Which?*, that found that nearly three-quarters of sunglasses bought on high street did not conform to British standards. ●