

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Stars ring in 70 years of Gucci 'Horsebit' Loafer

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A new campaign celebrates the anniversary of a signature style with the help of Irish actor Paul Mescal and Chinese talent Xiao Zhan. Image courtesy of Gucci

By ZACH JAMES

Italian fashion label Gucci is celebrating the anniversary of a signature footwear style.

The brand's latest delivery dives into the lineage of the "Horsebit 1953 Loafer," which turns 70 years old this year. Starring Irish actor Paul Mescal, and Chinese actor and singer Xiao Zhan, the advertising campaign brings fresh faces in to highlight the heritage product with contemporary flair.

Shoe case

Helmed by Gucci creative director Sabato De Sarno, imagery and video depict the dual stars donning Gucci's shoes.

While both stars appear in marketing, Mr. Mescal is given the true spotlight, more prominently featured in visuals that are now live on social media.

However, the choice of inclusion involving both stars strikes as strategic, with Gucci appearing to go after a wider range of audiences.

Celebrating the shoe's 70th anniversary, a new film slots in under the overarching campaign.

Paul Mescal stars in the new Horsebit 1953 Loafer campaign

In it, Mr. Mescal is shown lounging while wearing his Horsebit 1953 loafers, praising the comfortability of the leather shoes.

The Oscar nominee sports a variety of luxury looks while doing so, from boxers and an overcoat to a textured t-shirt and dress pants.

Overall, assets appeal to the casual dresser, a far cry from other Gucci activations the Irishman has taken part in ([see story](#)).

In terms of soundtrack, the mini-movie opts for a musical arrangement of low-key drums and strings. Remaining relaxed in tone, the initiative still keys in on traditional yet minimalist hallmarks.

The film shows off the upscale nature of the leather accessory throughout its duration. Meanwhile, a distinctly old-school feel is brought forth with creative treatment that appears almost as though it was shot on film.



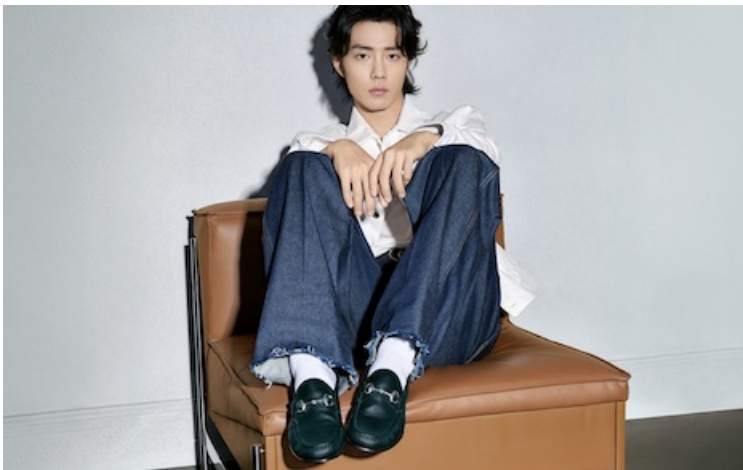
Mr. Mescal leans into luxury with this latest activation. Image courtesy of Gucci/Heji Shin

Mr. Zhan's portion of the campaign is extremely similar to that of Mr. Mescal's.

He wears an array of relaxed or business-casual clothing, stretched out on chairs or seated in sedentary positions.

His audience overseas is massive, garnering over 31 million followers on the Chinese social media site Weibo. With this large fanbase, Mr. Zhan is an ambassador for a number of luxury houses, including Gucci ([see story](#)), Italian fashion label Tod's ([see story](#)), Swiss watch manufacturer Zenith ([see story](#)), France's YSL Beauty and German automaker Audi, among others.

Gucci's Horsebit design, "a double ring connected by a bar," was first seen in the early 1950s before being miniaturized and applied to the brand's loafers in 1953. The release appears to have stood the test of time, now available for 70 years.



Mr. Zhan is a highly recognizable face in Eastern markets, bringing Gucci a dedicated audience in the region. Image courtesy of Gucci/Feng Li

In the modern age, the Horsebit 1953 has the opportunity to appeal to a whole new generation of consumers, bringing in favorites of Western millennials, Gen Z audiences and those within the APAC region as faces of the footwear.

Fresh face

Mr. Mescal, who is 27 years old, is seemingly at the beginning of a long and illustrious career, making him an intriguing name for luxury to buy into before his inevitable emergence into the mainstream.

Well-known within the film world for his Academy Award nomination for the 2022 film *Aftersun*, he originally gained notoriety for his acclaimed role in 2020's Hulu drama series "Normal People," gaining him an Emmy nomination.

However, he has been off social media since 2022.



The talent is poised for a mainstream breakout. Image courtesy of Gucci/Heji Shin

Despite this, he remains an ever-popular name among independent film fans and those who know him for his relationship with American singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers, an increasingly familiar name in the alternative music scene.

While Mr. Mescal has worked with luxury labels in the past, being named an ambassador for French jewelry maison Cartier in 2022, he has room to grow into a wide-ranging face for the sector, much like Mr. Zhan has become in China.

With Mr. Mescal's upcoming roles in Hollywood productions, such as *Gladiator 2* alongside industry veterans Denzel Washington and Pedro Pascal, and rumors swirling of his involvement in an upcoming Marvel Studios project, the Irish actor's stock within the luxury space, as well as a general audience's awareness of Mr. Mescal, is about to skyrocket.

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