



## HENRY HERBERT TAILORS

### Measured by Moped

*Mobile tailor Henry Herbert offers a unique – and indeed speedy – way to give customers the bespoke suit of their heart’s desire*

Article by Rupert Watkins Photography by Andy Barnham

When chatting with Charlie Baker-Collingwood, the urbane founder of Henry Herbert tailors, the remake of *The Thomas Crown Affair* kept flashing through my head. The firm’s cutters’ ability to smartly deliver themselves to one’s office by scooter to measure you up reminded me of the scene in which Pierce Brosnan’s character is being fitted out with a new suit at work whilst simultaneously screwing over business rivals and rather hoping his team of decoy criminals break into the Met Museum. If Charlie has met any such dapper and dastardly Masters of the Universe on his moped travels, he wasn’t letting on.

Founded in 2007 as a scooter-mounted bespoke shirt specialist, Charlie branched out into suits a couple of years later. Utilising the splendid marketing idea of putting pretty girls in bowlers outside of tube stations, he got his business off to a good start – though he ruefully admits that, when he tried it again, the Square Mile had inured itself quite quickly to this colourful form of advertising.

He has a mixed clientele, both in terms of age range and profession. He has found with the profusion of blogs and magazines that clients come to him ever more informed of what they want, but many still desire guidance – effectively reassurance – about the investment they are embarking on.

The house style is slim, waisted with the coat cut long. The huge majority of his suits are cut in a flexible, all year round 12 ounce cloth (he sources most of his range of suitings through Holland & Sherry). Charlie stresses that “there are no right or wrong answers”, and listens and advises clients accordingly. He is happy for potential clients to go away to further their research before embarking upon their first bespoke commission, and frequently counsels over-enthusiastic customers to start with just one item before taking stock of their further needs and reviewing how he has served them. This open-minded and courteous behaviour has resulted in a small but loyal clientele. Given his relative newness, repeat custom is evolving as his business matures. The very nature of English bespoke tailoring means that one should not be having to replace anything on a regular basis.

Realising the possibilities and flexibility a mobile business model has, Charlie will measure his customers wherever they wish. Two to three fittings will still be required – rushing in between lanes of traffic does not mean rushing the details. Henry Herbert is a very small company, consisting of two cutters, two seamstresses and a trouser maker.

In many ways, this flexibility is key to his success, especially when it comes to one of the services he offers: Henry Herbert has been affiliated with a number of London’s concierge companies, and directly involved with a number of hotels, for some time now. The responsiveness of its service – either Charlie or his companion cutter can be available until 10 or 11 o’clock in the evening and from as early as six in the morning – allows alterations and emergency repairs to be done for travelling businessmen. Once the concierge service or hotel has facilitated the link, Henry Herbert tailors will deal directly with the customer.

A small but important part of his business is alterations: in many ways the mark of a fine tailor, given that you have to deal with whatever is behind the seams and leave no trace. Charlie showed me a morning coat he had been asked to repair, originally dating from 1937. The customer had asked for the sleeves to be altered from the shoulder – a far more complex sartorial surgical feat than working from the cuff. Whilst he also experimented with offering a women’s tailoring service it was a mixed success: Charlie felt “they reached the edge” of the company’s abilities to provide to the level they felt they wished to and so ended this outfitting flirtation.

Like a number of the newer tailors plying their trade amongst the august giants of the industry, Charlie came to this profession via a circular route. Having read politics at university, he worked in Parliament before moving to a current affairs magazine. The siren call of tailoring was eventually given in to and Charlie enrolled at Morley College, London, to study coat making, Central St Martin’s for waistcoats and took a City and Guilds qualification at City of Westminster College. He decided to throw himself straight into the business with his unique two-wheeled selling point, rather than take an apprenticeship with a larger tailoring house.

So what does the future hold for this scooter based cutting wizard? Charlie feels the next two to three years will see him refine and perfect Henry Herbert’s current offering within the confines and limitations of the firm’s present setup. He is very keen to grow his custom service carefully, “keeping things as natural as possible”. Operating a lot by word of mouth, Charlie has also found other customers have been drawn to him through Google searches for a London tailor, hence the professionalism and colourfulness of the Henry Herbert website. The attention coming from his concierge service means he has an international clientele: he will measure and conduct fittings whilst people are transiting through London before shipping the finished article after them.

Since founding Henry Herbert, Charlie has remained steadfast in his determination to offer something “timeless”, to respect the values and traditions of English tailoring heritage. He hasn’t seen any real “fashion” influences in his time wielding the shears, and believes that the nature of the workmanship and investment put into his suits means his customers shy away from the fripperies and vagaries of fashion. With a price point comfortably below many bespoke tailors (he does not offer a made-to-measure option), should one be nervous at the prospect of crossing the threshold of a more august house, Riddle definitely suggests you contact Henry Herbert tailors and wait for the nattily clad cutter pull up outside at a time of your choosing. [R](#)