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The Style Maven

Great Breton

Bretons will be classic style staples until people stop talking about Picasso, which will be never. You can dig out a loose striped top and mentally channel Jean Seberg or Debbie Harry any old time. But there's something particularly about bank holidays that demands a Breton.

Is it because we like to take to the rivers or the seaside on an August day off? Or because they look cheery in a downpour (especially against a fisherman's yellow raincoat). Or because they have long sleeves, keep out the cold and are roomy enough to cope with bellies full of fish 'n' chips? All of these, I think. With the added air of jauntiness a stripe always brings.

Steph Stevens, *Stella's* contributing fashion editor, was the first Breton-obsessed person I came across outside Jean-Luc Godard films. This was last millennium, when she bought them from Arthur Beale, a nautical shop in Covent Garden. She still does. Sometimes she'll pick one up in a French army surplus store. "I like them slightly oversized," she says. "The point is to have them as my easy-to-wear clothing. They get better with age, so I never throw them out."



If you can't make it to Arthur Beale and you're not passing a French army surplus store, don't panic. You have lots of British brands at your disposal for the classic boat-neck, wide-fit style: Boden, St James (from atterleyroad.com), Joules, and Seasalt, which does its Bretons in organic cotton. The girl-about-town may also like Chinti and Parker's with its sprinkling of stars. Or there's MiH Jeans' Breton Saddle Top with its contrasting yoke, cuff

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and hem in expensive-looking vanilla – great with faded denim, turned up over tanned ankles and a Gucci snaffle loafer.

For a different take I also love Petit Bateau's navy wool cardigan (from avenue32.com). Perfectly schoolgirl from the front, it has a maroon- and white-striped contrast back. It will be classically understated with a mid-length A-line skirt, white brogues, Superga pumps or a double-strap Birkenstock. Or, if the inevitable happens: wellies. ●

Three Best BRETON STRIPES



Star-print, £90, by *Chinti and Parker*, from net-a-porter.com



C'est la vie logo, £75, by *Whistles* (whistles.co.uk)



Breton Saddle Top, £115, by *MiH Jeans* (mih-jeans.com)