

Diamonds Handbags are a girl's best friend

Of all the subjects that divide men and women, it is probably the female love of accessories – and handbags in particular – that ***baffles*** men the most. For women, a handbag is a statement of personality and attitude. It is an indicator of status, a weapon in a crowd and a home on the move. For men, it seems to be little more than an expensive device for carrying around unwanted receipts and other useless items. It is certainly no substitute for a really good trouser pocket.

The gap between the sexes looks likely to grow deeper with a study suggesting that women's love affair with handbags has reached a new level of intensity. Over the past decade sales of handbags in the UK ***soared*** by 146 per cent to a record £350 million. Claire Birks, the author of the study, believes that the phenomenal growth is being fuelled in part by the must-have celebrity handbag. "The rising number of working women has played a key role in this market as they not only have the money but also the need for stylish, well-accessorized outfits and handbags. It is now commonplace for women to have a wide variety of bags for a whole host of occasions – from smart evenings out to a night in the pub and from a day in the office to a day's shopping."

Top of the range designer bags with price labels of £1000 are not uncommon and their popularity has never been greater. Any woman wanting one of this seasons must-have handbags, the Dior Gaucho, should be prepared to fork out £815 and join a month-long waiting list. It takes just a glimpse of a new Gucci or Chloe bag on the arm of Kate Moss or Paris Hilton in Heat magazine for that model to fly off the shelves at Selfridges and Harrods. But while designer brands have played a part, the rising sales have mostly been driven by cheaper imported handbags and own-label imitation designs.

Tamara Mellon, the owner of the Jimmy Choo label, said she had seen a major change in the accessory market. "It doesn't matter what you are wearing – if you have good shoes and a good bag, you will look right," she said. "Handbags are a status symbol, the perfect accessory to dress up your day and your outfit. For women of all ages and from all walks of life, acquiring a handbag is an enjoyable experience." Last year a study found that 60 per cent of women own at least 10 handbags, while three per cent have at least 25. In addition to this, ***it*** also suggests that the demand for handbags has yet to be sated. "There is no reason to believe that sales will not continue to increase over the next five years," Miss Birks said.

While men may remain baffled by the attraction of handbags, some light has been shed on what they contain. A survey of 1700 women carried out by Prudential discovered that alongside the old train tickets, receipts and pens, the average handbag contains around £550 worth of personal possessions. Typically, they include a mobile phone, a purse, a hairbrush, perfume, a make-up bag, a leather diary or personal organizer, and house and car keys. In summer months, a pair of sunglasses usually joins the collection. Most women questioned assumed that their handbags and contents were worth only £150.

Leggete il brano, e per le domande 1-10, scegliete la risposta (A, B, C, D) che meglio corrisponde al testo. Solo una delle risposte è corretta.

30 punti

1. How does the (male) writer feel about women's obsession with handbags?

- A He thinks men need to carry them too.
- B He thinks they contain a lot of non-essential objects.
- C He thinks they are too expensive.
- D He thinks it's a short-term craze.

2. In the context of paragraph 1, which is the best synonym for baffles?

- A confuses
- B excites
- C earns
- D requires

3. In the context of paragraph 2, what is the best synonym for soared?

- A concentrated
- B diminished
- C diversified
- D grew

4. Whose influence is encouraging women to spend more on handbags?

- A their husbands and boyfriends
- B their colleagues at work
- C famous people
- D large corporations

5. What is the problem with the Dior Gaucho bag?

- A There are not enough of them on sale.
- B It is the most expensive bag on the market.
- C It is not popular any more.
- D You have to be a member of a special club to buy one.

6. Most handbag sales in the UK are

- A only from a few famous shops.
- B generated only by a small number of designers.
- C only made in one season of the year.
- D from selling bags that look like more famous ones.

7. How does Tamara Mellon feel about handbags?

- A Any handbag will look good.
- B You have to match your clothes very carefully with your handbag.
- C What you wear on your feet is as important as your handbag.
- D Handbags aren't really very important.

8. In the context of paragraph 4, what does the pronoun it refer to?

- A the typical handbag
- B annual sales of handbags
- C a report on handbag ownership
- D the number of handbags people have

9. What do women's handbags typically contain?

- A some cosmetic items
- B mainly cheap objects
- C no objects that are useful for work
- D nothing relating to their home

10. What do many women feel about the value of their handbag contents?

- A They underestimate it.
- B They overestimate it.
- C They aren't able to guess how much it is.
- D They know exactly how much it is.

Per ulteriori 20 punti, scrivete un breve testo in inglese, in cui parlate di come la moda ci fa desiderare oggetti che non ci servono. Avete mai comprato un oggetto che poi non avete mai usato?

The magic of marketing

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.