

Philip Street, SW6,  
tel: 0171-627 2414)  
has been full since

with centuries of tradition  
and now makes hats for  
stylish ladies.

Below: Kristi Prens in Gail Hoppen couture suit, £1,000, and hat by John Boyd, £200; Jennifer Spring, in suit from New York, £300, and Katherine Goodison hat, £150; Helen Fairbrother in Gianni Versace ensemble, £1,500, and Herald and Heart's 'grandiflora' hat, £400; Jenny Khom Kham, in Chanel suit, £1,600, and hat from Harrods



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Ascot 1995 is proving to be one of the most elegant of the decade – but at a price.  
**Hilary Alexander** admired the parade on Opening Day. Pictures by **Stephen Lock**

**I**F I HAD any doubts that the recession was finally out of fashion, they were dispelled in a few hours on Tuesday. Smart money and even smarter clothes conspired to make this one of the most elegant Ascot Opening Days in nearly a decade.

More than £1 million in cash went on the horses in on-course bets with the Tote. This sum is probably not dissimilar to that which clothed the women and, increasingly, men who traditionally make Royal Ascot the best-dressed event of the season.

Valentino, Dries van Noten,

Tomasz Starzewski, Yves Saint Laurent, MaxMara, Moschino, Donna Karan, Alberta Ferretti, Bruce Oldfield and Chanel — the designer labels swirled by in a mix rich enough to make any bank manager see red, a distinctly unstylish shade this season.

Then there were the hats, a monument to *le grand splurge*. Royal milliner Freddie Fox, British Fashion Award-winning Philip Treacy and comparative newcomers Herald and Heart of Battersea were the favourites (conservative average £200 a hat). But the top price was the £1,000

ivy-and-roses creation designed by Nicholas Oakley for couturier Isabell Kristensen.

This season saw the death of the Ascot Uniform approach to style: standard-issue spaniel's ears hair, big-brim hat and the regulation suit with short, tight skirt showing a lot of leg. Also on the way out was the tired shoulder bag on a metal chain. It was superseded by a range of small handbags to clutch or slip over the wrist.

Overall, there was a more varied and individual sense of style. More women had realised that being "in fashion"

was less important than achieving a *total* look that worked from head to toe. Hair did not swamp hats; heels (medium height) and hemlines (best on or covering the knee) were a perfect match.

All of which is good news for those of us who shop on the high street. Chains such as Episode, Jigsaw, Hennes and Dorothy Perkins have replicated the key looks of the season — softer lines, pastels, dress-and-jacket ensembles — and many of the top milliners now design cheaper ready-to-wear collections for the multiples.