

# Axel de Beaufort

From saddles and bridles to cars and planes, Hermès has always been about travel *à la mode*. Now it's surging ahead with a brilliant young designer in its engineering hot seat. *By* ALICE B-B



## TRUNK SHOW

Axel de Beaufort with some of Le Sur-Mesure Hermès prototypes, including a plane seat and a specially upholstered 1935 Voisin vintage car, June 6, 2016

range boxes, good handbags, silky scarves... Yes. But for a lucky, large-walleted few, Hermès can deliver so much more than a Birkin. Head to the outskirts of Paris and, in a warehouse in the artisan district of Pantin, is the nerve centre for Le Sur-Mesure Hermès. Behind the iron gates (in a building that was once filmmaker Luc Besson's studio) is a secret laboratory where around 400 made-to-measure projects are created each year—from handbags and helicopters to skateboards and rickshaws—including bespoke luggage for Marc Newson's vintage Bugatti, and a *tripporteur* delivery tricycle for the school run. For luxury-loving design obsessives, it's like walking into a Hamleys for grown-ups.

Beyond the double door, craftsmen are buffing, studding, edging and cutting; maintaining the traditions upheld since 1837, when Hermès found success in hand-

crafting the lightest, most technically advanced saddlery. At the helm sits Axel de Beaufort, a boyish, scooter-riding 38-year-old, who in 2011 was plucked for the role by artistic director Pierre-Alexis Dumas, a sixth-generation family member of Hermès. Axel is a sailor with a double degree in naval design and engineering. His first commission—a 60ft yacht called *Solune*—won him Yacht of the Year 2004 from the Royal Ocean Racing Club of London.

The commissions came flooding in. He was asked to consult on an ongoing project for Hermès: the Beach Boat, a 40ft slow-motion day boat with flaps at the bow that open to create a decked "beach" area. Hermès was impressed, and de Beaufort was appointed design and engineering director. "I always knew about Hermès, but I didn't know about Le Sur-Mesure... I liked it immediately," he recalls.

The next project was a bicycle. The

result: a unisex carbon-fibre model, one of the lightest on the market, with innovations including the ability to change gears at standstill and a rubber belt instead of a traditional chain. What appeals most to de Beaufort about his role is combining forward-thinking engineering with the highest level of craftsmanship to satisfy the sometimes esoteric needs of clients.

"We're doing technically complex things," he explains. "When you do a car, plane or boat, it's not only about hanging curtains or adding leatherwork. You want to be a step ahead, to push boundaries, to bring new functions. We're avant-garde, while guarding the artisanal. Our mission is to accompany men and women with elegance in their lives and voyages. Make us part of your dreams, whether big or small."

So what could be on the horizon—space? Because let's be clear: at Le Sur-Mesure Hermès, the sky is *not* the limit. □