## Men's Formal Attire, Here Comes The Groom! By Janet Gundlach



When most people think of formal wear, we tend to think of evening events-parties, the opera, or a formal dinner. Men also wore formal attire for building dedications, ceremonies and political functions but probably the most common event for men's formal attire were weddings.

The April, 1929 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal* suggests that the groom should dress up to the bride, because a well-dressed bridegroom sets off the bride to the best advantage. *The man's attire is determined by the formality of the bride's costume.* 

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This bridegroom is dressed in a formal day turnout, which is also the correct attire for the men of the bridal party as well as of the male guests at a formal wedding.

For the formal day wedding the bride is dressed in a traditional gown of white with a long trailing veil and the man's attire "has been prescribed by many years of tradition from which no deviation is permissible." The groom wears a conventional cutaway coat in black or oxford gray cheviot with the edges that may or may not be bound in braid, but as of this date, they state that not being bound in braid is the "smarter". The trousers may be of a black & white or black & gray striped worsted or a fine black & white checked that gives the impression of gray. These stripes are very subtle.

For spring weddings a waistcoat (vest) could be a different color than the jacket. It could be fawn color, gray cloth or white linen. Again, they state that if the spats match the color of the vest, it is a very "smart touch". The wearing of spats with formal day clothes is not a necessity but a matter of preference. Again, the spats must fit precisely and color correct or they will become noticeable and a distraction from the groom's appearance.

Black shoes are definitely correct and can be of patent leather or black calfskin.

The proper tie for a cutaway worn with a wing collar shirt is an Ascot or a bow tie of striped, figured black & white or gray & black silk. A four-in-hand may be correctly worn but is more suitable for an older man. A turndown collar can be worn with a cutaway but then a four-in-hand tie is correct tie.

Top hats are totally correct and white doeskin gloves should be worn. They also state that silk gloves should never be worn and "are considered the worst possible taste". A plain white handkerchief should be worn in the breast pocket whether the man is the groom, an usher or a guest.

A plain white shirt with a plain or pleated starched front or a faint gray or black hairline stripe is correct. However, if the shirt does have stripes then the tie should be plain gray silk or black & white or black & gray patterned silk if an ascot or four-in-hand is worn. If a bow tie is worn with a striped shirt having a wing collar, than a small geometric design would be more appropriate.

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Either the cutaway or a short black jacket, worn with the same accessories as are correct with the formal cutaway, may be correctly worn at an informal daytime wedding.

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At a formal evening wedding that takes place after 7 pm whether in a church, hotel or at the bride's house the groom, best man, ushers and male guests wear full evening dress. This consists of a tail coat of black or very dark navy blue worn with a stiff shirt of white linen or piqué, a white waistcoat (vest) of the same material as the shirt, and is either single or double breasted, and a white bow tie worn with a wing collar. Black waistcoats and black ties are not correct with full dress and are correct only with a dinner jacket. Black patent leather oxfords or pumps are correct. The outfit is completed with a silk top hat and white kid gloves. A man can wear a tie tack and cufflinks but these must be of pearl set in platinum or gold; colored jewelry white is considered incorrect.

For the informal day wedding which takes place at church or at home of the bride, the correct attire for the groom, the best man and male guests is the same as any other occasion where formal day dress is required. However, when there are no ushers, instead of the cutaway coat, men may wear a short black jacket with gray or striped trousers. The jacket should be single breasted and have one or two buttons. A bow tie or four in hand tie may be worn with the short jacket. Three choices of hats are okay with a short black jacket & striped trousers: the top silk hat, a bowler or a gray felt Homburg hat. The snap-brim is not correct and is only worn with sports and when traveling.

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The bridegroom, his best man and ushers, and the male guests at a formal evening wedding wear full evening dress, consisting of tail coat, white waistcoat and tie and white kid gloves.



Note in the above photo: #334 is the cutaway with the vest the same material as the coat. #333 is the full evening dress with a tail coat, white stiff shirt and a white waistcoat. This gentleman wears a white bow tie, white gloves and would have a top hat. This article from the *Ladies' Home Journal* states that the Tuxedos are not correct for a wedding. Also reference page 102 from *A Book of Fashion Facts*. If the ceremony is preformed in a garden and the bride wears a white satin dress with a long white veil, than the men of the bridal party must have the same attire as if the wedding was preformed inside.



However, if the bride wears a gown of organdie or some other material and wears a hat (no veil), than white trousers and a dark coat of navy blue or oxford gray may be worn by the men of the wedding party. Preferably this coat should be double breasted. A winged collar is not correct and a man should wear a turn down collar with a four-in-hand. White or white & tan or white & black shoes with white socks are correct.

Under the ushers duties it states that the men's hats and sticks (walking cane) should be left in the vestibule of the church. The bridegroom picks up his hat, stick & gloves as he leaves the church. The bridegroom and his best man do not wear their gloves during the ceremony.

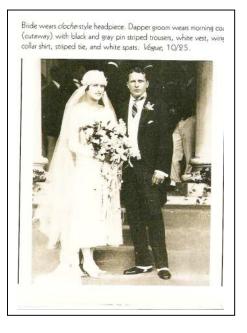
The bridegroom gives his best man and ushers a souvenir of the occasion, which could be a cigarette case, a scarf pin, a key ring, walking stick or a pair of cufflinks.

Obviously from this article there were very precise rules of dress for a wedding. The Model A era required clothes for certain functions-sports, work, shopping, and semi & formal functions. A man would never be seen in public without a hat or tie. With this article, the questions are answered about the men's hats, gloves & walking stick during the ceremony. Of course there were rules as to the woman's dress also. Again, the above recommendations for the groom and male attendees were not always followed. Perhaps the rules and lack of money forced many young couples to put on their Sunday best and visit the judge or have a simple wedding at the bride's house with the minister and immediate family only.

Wedding photos are still kept as family keepsakes and provide great reference.

Below are some photos from Ellie Laubner's *Fashions of the Roaring '20s*. Note the difference from the formal and informal weddings. The 1925 photo (1.) from Vogue shows the groom in a cutaway, white vest, a four-in-hand tie and spats. The next photo to the right also shows a man in a cutaway with a white bow tie. The lower left photo has groom in a suit but with a black bow tie. In the informal wedding picture, lower right, the gentlemen appear to wear their "Sunday Best" suit.

Note: Several of these photos, the one from Vogue and the one below it, are earlier than our Model A era by several years but men's attire changed very little during these years. These are just examples of what to look for in researching men's wedding attire and one dated within our Model A years would be needed as documentation for judging.









Research your family wedding photos and notice not only what the bride is wearing, is she wearing a formal or informal dress and then note what the gentleman are wearing.

Refer to the Fashion Guidelines and men's section of "Evening & Formal Wear" in A Book of Fashion Facts.

References: *Ladies' Home Journal*, April, 1929; *Strauss Brothers Master Tailors*, Fall/Winter 1928-1929; *Fashions of the Roaring '20s* by Ellie Laubner

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