



Illustration Craig Ward

Join the fat club

Fat Faces are the flamboyant extroverts of typography, whose curvaceous lines flaunt a loveable gaiety. **Caroline Archer** looks at the development of these fun types...

Fat Faces first hit the printing presses back in the early 19th century. They underwent something of a revival in the opening years of the 20th century, and have now been redefined by the designers of today.

In many respects the original Fat Faces are extreme versions of the Modern faces, such as Bodoni, that were popular in the mid-18th century. Fat Faces take the characteristics of the Moderns and push them to extremes: they play with weight, structure and proportions to produce riotous, joyful, fat

letterforms full of character... if not sophistication. And just when you might have thought the structure of a typeface could be pushed no further, along come the Elephants, which take the basics of the Fat Faces and push them even closer to the edge.

Until the mid-18th century, one category of typefaces dominated – that which was designed by Aldus Manutius in 1495 and on which all subsequent Roman types were based. In the mid-18th century, English type founders introduced variations into the Roman tradition by →

→ experimenting with increasing the contrast in the weight of the strokes. Baskerville was the first to do this, and the results were emphasised when his designs were re-cut by Wilson & Fry and pushed further still by the type designs of John Bell in 1788. By 1800, the Modern face had succeeded the traditional Roman lettering.

The introduction of the Modern face was important because it not only gave designers the liberty to invent and experiment, it was also the first step to creating a Fat Face: a category of type designed specifically for display rather than for flowing text, and one intended to be neither ordinary, inconspicuous nor beautiful, merely expressive. The new market of advertising had been recognised and different approaches to typography discovered: Fat Faces were a result of this new way of thinking and an answer to advertising's needs.



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An advertising postcard found in Birmingham recently showing an elegant use of a contemporary Fat Face.

The origin of the Fat Face is difficult to plot. First introduced by William Cotterell in 1766 for advertising purposes, the types were simply normal letters enlarged beyond the scale of usual text type. The first specifically designed Fat Face was created by Robert Thorn – an apprentice of Cotterell, in 1807.

So how do you recognise an original Fat Face when you see one? It has large letters with vertical shading and abrupt modelling that is so exaggerated the thick stroke is almost half as wide as the letter is high. The roundness in the letters is also more emphasised. All original Fat Faces share common characteristics as follows: the 'C', 'G' and 'S' have barbed terminals and the 'G' has a pointed spur (see our 'Body Parts' feature on page 20 for a full glossary of typography terms). The 'J' is short and terminates in blobbed finials, while the 'Q' is drawn with a looping tail that curls inside the bowl, and the 'R' has a curly tail.

Fat Faces have serifs that are either unbracketed or slightly bracketed, but those ending a thin vertical stroke are invariably bracketed. The italic letters have concave endings to the stems of the lower case letters and flamboyant



Paulus M. Dreiboldz of Gaffa Editions explains why Fat Faces aren't his favourite fonts...

"Design-wise some of those monsters manifest surprisingly interesting features. However, I think most of them are failed attempts to create something worth looking at. They're good for a laugh, though.

"Would I use them? No. As far as I'm concerned, they are the typographic reflection of the industrialisation in the 19th century and as such the starting point of advertising in typography. They have, however, relevant and beautiful counterparts in the Ionic and Clarendons, which, used in larger sizes, show more typographic subtlety and beauty than Fat Faces.

"Will there be a revival? Of course – everything is due to be revived at some point. Whether they are worth it is another question. I don't think that anyone ever saw them as beautiful, but more as funny and naively confident. As such, they are doomed to be revived again, I'm sure." www.gaffadesign.com

swashes on the 'M', 'N', 'A', 'W'. The abundance of curves make the letters appear less serious than the Roman, and the rotundity adds to their charm if not the perfection.

There was something of a Fat Face revival in the 1920s and 30s, which was led by the Kynoch Press in Birmingham, England, when it released a number of early English Fat Faces, Elephants and Black Letters along with some contemporary faces designed in the spirit of the original Fat Faces. Discerning clients appreciated the reappearance of these friendly fonts, which were then

introduced by other design-led printers across the UK.

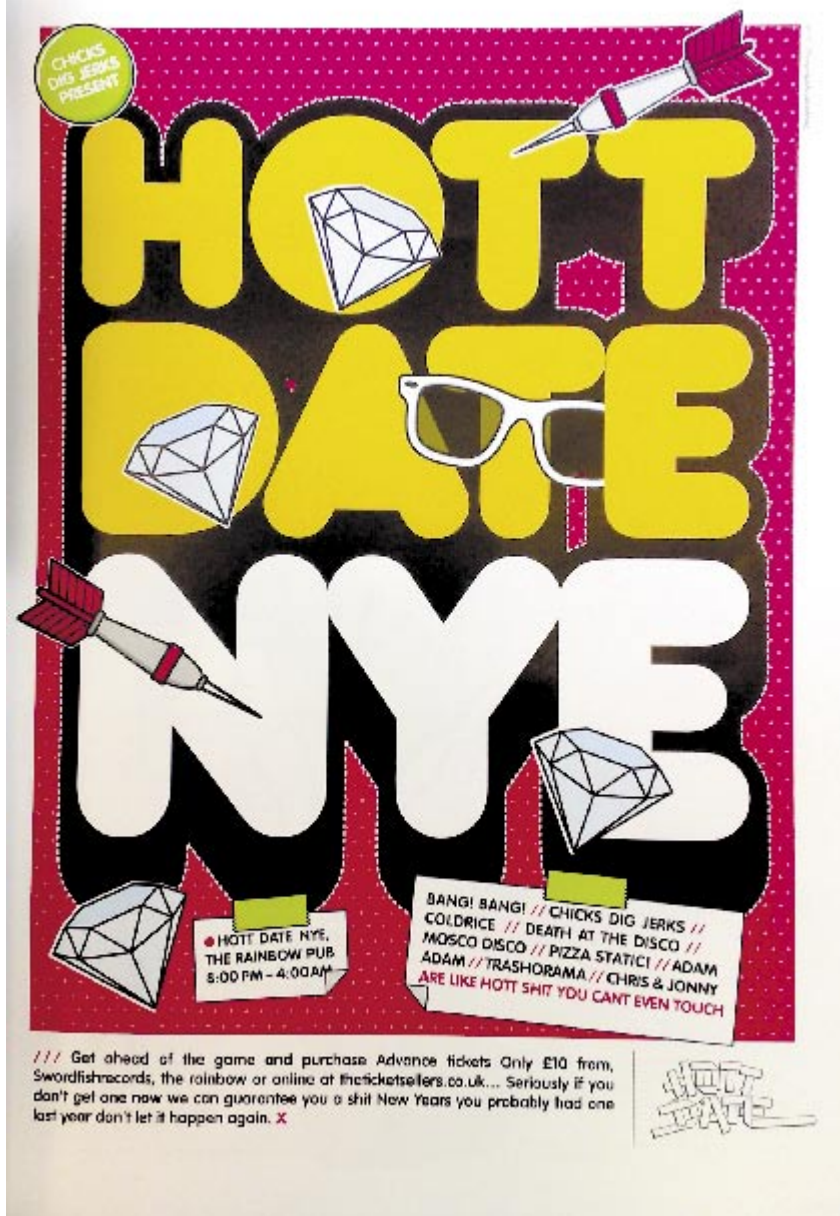
One example of a contemporary Fat Face in use during this period is Cooper Black, designed by Oswald B Cooper for the American Typefounders in 1921. An extra bold face with blurry serifs and tiny counters, it was the most popular typeface ever to be released in the US. No single typeface has made quite the impression on the graphic design community as Cooper Black, which was revived during the 1970s and again in the 2000s. In 1991 International Type Corporation released Oswald, a Fat →

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02 Loke Fat Face, designed by Brian Loke, UK, 2008.

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05 Fat faces were a result of a new way of thinking in the 1800s, and an answer to advertising needs



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A hybrid fat Face designed by Lisa Robins, USA, 1986.

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A recent interpretation of a Fat Face hand-drawn by Brazilian typographer, Claudio Roche

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Oswald Cooper's rendering of a sans serif Fat Face, USA, 1913.

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→ Face revival from the creative hand of British typeface designer Dave Fairley. In this design Fairley captured the creative spirit of Cooper, one of America's most important type designers. But this was not Fairley's first attempt at a Fat Face – back in 1972 he designed ITC Beesknees, a big fat font inspired by the typographic titles of the Marx Brothers films.

By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, new interpretations on the Fat Face had evolved and contemporary versions can be serif, sans, slab, script or display fonts.

Among the new Fat Face designers is Richard Kegler from P22, USA, who designed the Daddy-O Fat Face. Based on the lettering of the Beat Generation Era, Daddy-O FF was originally introduced in 1995 as a collaborative effort between The Whitney Museum of American Art and P22. Menino – for whom the term Fat Face is an understatement – is a hugely obese sans serif display font designed by Hector Herrera at GarageFonts, in 2000.

Nick Curtis, who designed Scram Gravy, USA, 2001 describes his font as 'Bodoni on steroids'.

The list of contemporary Fat Faces is almost without end, but of those that prefer their new designs as interpretations of historic faces, is the Red Rooster foundry, which recently offered an eye-stopping selection of decorative faces such as Basuto and Bodoni. Phil Martin at URW++, USA designed Fat Face in 2001, which, as its name suggests is a definite throw back to the original Fat Faces.

Jon Melton from Em Foundry is also producing exquisite decorated fat Faces inspired by the originals. "I remember being intrigued by the display of price tags on market holders' fruit and veg stalls – a big fat serif letter offering apples or potatoes by the pound (in weight) for old money shillings and pence," says Melton. "It is perhaps no surprise that later as a designer, quick hand-drawn letterforms for visuals were often rendered in a kind of Baskerville-like fat transitional – which remains to date my most natural drawn letterform."

Another designer bringing the Fat Face phenomenon right up to date is Bryan Loke. "There is already a new era of Fat Faces," he says. "To me, the current trend of colouring out counters of (any) typefaces and giving them a negative 500 kerning is an attempt to address the



Jon Melton, Founder of Em Foundry and senior lecturer at Cambridge School of Art, takes inspiration from original Fat Face hand lettering:

"The market traders 'hand' obviously had its origins within the hawkers and peddlers of Georgian England, a vernacular that forced the need for the poster types and informed the Fat Faces of the 19th century. The expanding commercial conditions and popularised tastes led to a preoccupation with the fattening process of the 'modern' Roman letter. My preoccupation with this period has naturally led to a number of my EM Foundry types, which reflect this historical context that marks the emergence of Victorian typographic exuberance – so vehemently disregarded when I was a junior designer, but now pillaged for its ornament by a youth without enforced prejudice or preconception."

need for attracting attention – the same purpose those classical Fat Faces were made for.

"This 'blacked out' type trend is almost everywhere you turn: two in particular spring to my mind: SEA's *Ten Year Book* and Adrian Shaughnessy's *Look at this*. I guess that shows they're successful because they obviously got my attention. However, I find this trend of blacking out counters slightly frightening and I find it a little worrying that well-known designers are practicing it. I worry all these types shouting at the top of their blackened lungs will very soon deafen us, causing us to lose our calm, no longer hearing soft-spoken types and, before we know it, everyone will be screaming at one another."

So would Loke use the new Fat Faces in his work? "Yes, I too will shout

along with everyone else, but when I do, I might do it in a more classical manner."

Fat Faces are wonderful, wide, generous letters with less order but more pomp than the classic Roman: enormous letters that are genial and fantastic with extreme expressions and great, smiling, grotesque faces: they are blatant with unashamed vulgarity. In no way romantic or sentimental, Fat Faces from all eras flaunt a loveable gaiety and masterly command of the idiom of proportions. Smiling at themselves, their total lack of respect is refreshing.

For more on the latest type trends, be sure to pick up a copy of Computer Arts issue 150. In the magazine's Brief Encounters section award-winning designer Conor Breen shows how to animate your type.



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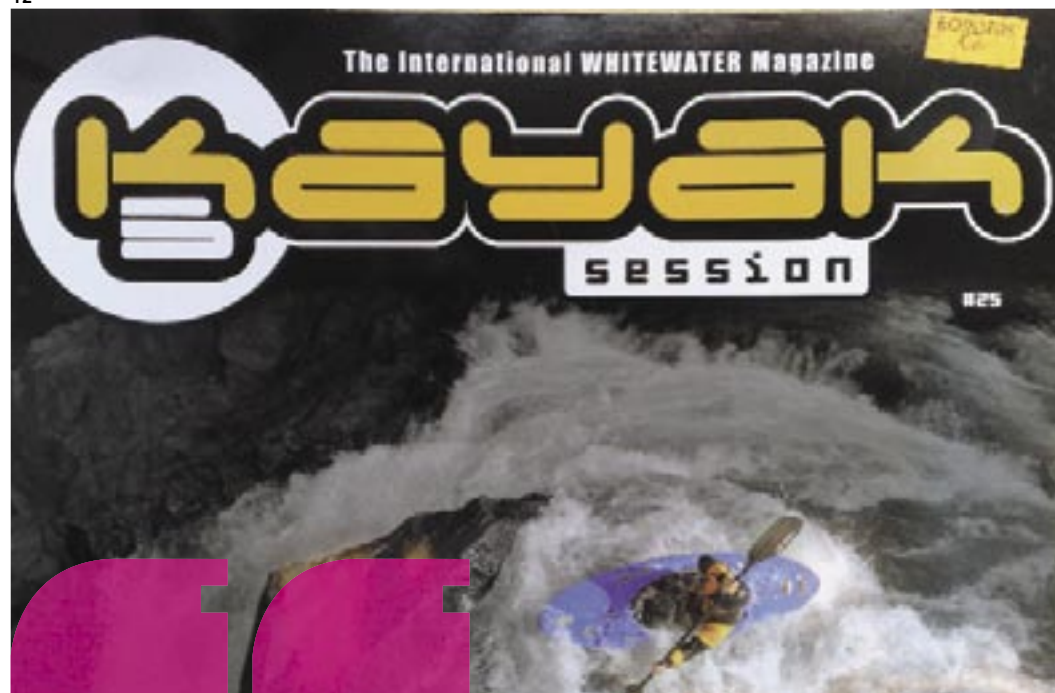
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I worry all these types shouting at the top of their blackened lungs will soon deafen us

Bryan Loke Designer/typographer



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Cover of Adrian Shaughnessy's Look at this UK, 2006.

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Fat Faces are found wherever there is a need for advertising – including the humble Tart Card.

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Fat Face Cyrillic, released by the International Type Corporation, USA, 1994.