

Get Your Kits Out For The Lads

After venting my rage at the bullshit Adidas writes about footballs, now it is time for me to rant about kits.

Selling replica football kits is now big business. It is estimated that Real Madrid earns about €200 million a year from official sales of its kits (though most of that money is the sponsorship fee that Adidas pays them).

Obviously, the manufacturers of kits are reluctant to say how much it costs to produce a football kit but in a recent article the BBC calculated the breakdown in the price of a shirt costing £100 is as follows:

- Manufacturing and shipping costs - £8.50
- Marketing and distribution costs - £9.50
- Sales tax - £13.50
- Manufacturer's (Nike, Adidas etc) profit - £16.25
- Retailer's profit - £37.4

Personally I think that the figure of £8.50 for manufacturing costs is far too high for what is a 100% synthetic product – after all one can get similar synthetic shirts on market stalls for £10 or less and that includes profit margins - but even assuming this generous figure it nonetheless is a good indicator of how football fans are getting screwed when they are asked to pay £100.

Not surprisingly, the extortionate price of shirts has led to a booming market in counterfeit shirts. And we don't simply mean those crappy "10 Messi" shirts you see on street markets in tourist resorts for €10. Today, it is quite easy to get shirts that look identical to the official ones, complete with Adidas/Nike/Puma logos for 1/3rd or 1/4 of the official price. These originate in the Far East, and the brand name manufacturers point out that when one buys a counterfeit shirt then you are supporting sweat shops, child labour and possible money laundering too. But here's the rub – all the Adidas, Nike and Puma shirts are made in the Far East too, probably by subcontractors who are also getting paid miserable wages and enduring terrible working conditions.

Furthermore, one of the biggest sources of counterfeit shirts is the on-line retailer Ali Express. Yet this is the same Ali Express that was an official partner of UEFA at Euro2024!

So replica shirts are overpriced. What makes the situation worse – at least for parents who are pressured into buying their children replica kits – is the practice of teams changing kits every season. And not just one shirt: the bigger teams will have at least three kits per season (my team, Manchester City, managed to squeeze even more money out of fans by having four kits for the 2025-26 season, plus an additional one for the 2025 World Club Championship tournament!).

And just to put the icing on the cake, the kit manufacturers show no shame in actually changing traditional colours. For example Nike went through a phase of having England wear all-white and France all-blue when their 'normal' colours are white with blue shorts/blue with white shorts, respectively. For the sake of selling a few pairs of shorts they are willing to tinker with history.

What makes all of this even more ironic is that today's synthetic football shirts have a half-life of about 30 years: they are virtually indestructible, do not shrink and do not

lose their colour. Add to that they are easy to wash and so they are perfect clothes for kids to wear – if only their obsolescence makes them out of fashion within 12 months.

As the BBC suggested, around 10% of the cost of a football shirt is the marketing costs. With the launch of each new shirt design the manufacturers make a press release that tries to justify what they have created as some sort of historical or artistic statement. These can be hilarious to read and one pities the junior employee who has been compelled to write this stuff (it would be too scary to think that the authors are sincere in what they write). Here are some examples for the latest World Cup kits:

- Japan's new 2026 home kit, featuring light blue curved lines **“symbolizes the Japanese horizon and represents the team's ambition to surpass past achievements and reach new heights”**
- Belgium's 2026 home kit, features flames (which are barely recognisable) that **“symbolizes the team's courageous and bold spirit”**. Remember that image when Lukaku is waddling around the pitch
- France's shirt is **“inspired by the Statue of Liberty, celebrating the historical ties between France and the USA”**. This is achieved by **“using ‘Metallic Copper’ as the secondary color tone, referencing the oxidized copper surface of the statue”**. I'm not making this up!!! Not only is that an example of creative writing being taken to a new level but it is not even accurate – the last time I looked the “oxidized copper surface” of the Statue of Liberty was a greenish colour, not copper-coloured!



And my favourite – text, not kit: for it is horrendous! – is Portugal's 2026 'away' kit.

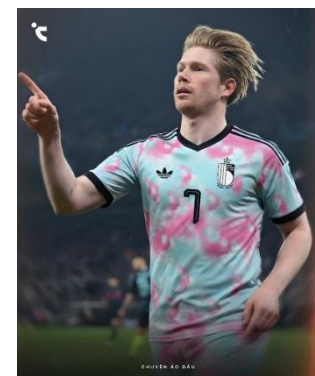


The design looks as if someone has vomited after a heavy night of drinking curaçao but is, apparently, **“inspired by the country's deep connection to the sea”** (ed: sea-sickness, more like). According to the manufacturer Puma: **“The away kit's theme, 'Connecting Heroes', reflects Puma's belief that the national team's players are heroes who inspire fans and connect**

people globally”. And there was I thinking that it merely represented a malfunctioning washing machine.....

You may have noticed that the words ‘symbolize’ and ‘inspired by’ do a lot of heavy lifting in these PR texts!!

I have thus been examining the abomination that Adidas has created as Belgium's 2026 'away kit' (pictured right) and have been “inspired” to make the following “interpretation” of what is officially described as a “Frozen Blue” shirt with “carbon, white, and light pink accents”:



“Ever woken up from a nap on the plane or train and found that you've dribbled on your shirt? Got out of bed on a Sunday morning to discover that you came home wearing most of your kebab? Well now you can recreate that image – but hygienically – with the new Belgium away shirt. And you can also show your solidarity with the LGBTQRS++++ community through the pink blotches. What's not to like?!”

