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Cooper Black is a heavy adaptation or as an extra bold weight version of the typeface Cooper Old Style that was also known as Cooper. It is classified as an old style serif typeface. Cooper Black has been noted have influence from Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and the Machine Age. The typeface’s family was the work of Oswald Bruce Cooper, co-owner of the Bertsch & Cooper design firm in Chicago. Although, Oswald Bruce Cooper developed Cooper Black in 1919, the Barnhart Brothers & Spindler foundry of Chicago first released Cooper Black in 1922. Oz Cooper was fond of saying that the Black fit the needs of ‘far-sighted printers with near-sighted customers.’

Cooper Black set a trend in ad types during the 1920s and 1930s which prompted such designers as Fred Goudy (one of Cooper’s early teachers) to follow suit with their own black faces (compared with Goudy Heavyface). Cooper Black has many imitations due to its popularity including Ludlow Black and Pabst Extra Bold. Despite all of the competition from other designers’ similar typefaces, Cooper Black still remains the most popular one to use even today.

Cooper Black

Cooper Black’s round serifs and small counters make it a bold, yet approachable and friendly typeface with a hint of perky personality. The typeface’s most distinguishing features are the ‘O’ and the ‘Q’ with a backward tilt on the counters. Also, the dots on the ‘i’ and ‘j’ are elliptical instead of a simple circle. Aside from the specific features within the letters, Cooper Black stands out primarily because of its boldness. Due to how bold it is and how little contrast there is, Cooper Black tends to do better on a strictly contrasting background.

Due to Cooper Black’s perky and bold personality as a typeface, it is used to make bold, clear, and fun statements. Some references to where Cooper Black is used includes logos for Tootsie Roll, The Odd Couple, M*A*S*H, Top Ramen, “Vote For Pedro” from Napoleon Dynamite, Garfield comics, and even some album covers for The Beach Boys, The Doors, and David Bowie.

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