

# Oxford Australia Word of the Month

November 2008

**bogan** – ‘1. A person who is not “with it” in terms of behaviour and appearance, and hence perceived as not being “one of us”. 2. An uncultured and unsophisticated person’

*Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*

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# bogan

## The story behind the Word of the Month

Until the middle of the twentieth century the Australian term *larrikin* was highly pejorative, and was synonymous with *hooligan*. The connotations of *larrikin* changed, and the word came to be used to describe a person who acts with disregard for social or political conventions. Australia needed a replacement for *larrikin*. There emerged some regional terms for the old-style *larrikin*: the *westie* in Sydney, the *bevan* in Queensland, the *booner* in Canberra, and the *chigga* (from the name of the suburb 'Chigwell') in Tasmania. There also emerged a new Australia-wide term—the *bogan*.

The earliest evidence we have been able to find for the term *bogan* is in the surfing magazine *Tracks* in September 1985: 'So what if I have a mohawk and wear Dr Martens (boots for all you uninformed bogans)?' At this stage, *bogan* was (especially teenage) slang for someone who is not 'with it' in terms of behaviour and appearance, someone who is 'not us'. The term became widespread after it was used in the 1980s by the fictitious schoolgirl 'Kylie Mole' in the television series *The Comedy Company*. In *Dolly Magazine*, October 1988, 'The Dictionary According To Kylie [Mole]' has the following Kyliquesque definition of *bogan*: 'a person that you just don't bother with. Someone who wears their socks the wrong way or has the same number of holes in both legs of their stockings. A complete loser.'

At about the same time, a second meaning for *bogan* emerged, represented by the following passage from Judith Clarke, *The Heroic Life of Al Capsella* (1988):

Beyond these the landscape changed suddenly.

It was still flat, and the houses all the same as one another, but they were poorer houses, small shabby fibro ones with their paint all washed away, their scraggly yards full of dust and weeds and rusting pieces of iron. I was nervous; it looked the kind of place where you might find Bogans hanging about, the kind of place you could get bashed up. ... Sure enough, in the yard of a house across the street, I saw a gang of Bogans in tight jeans and long checked shirts, mucking about with a big fancy car, vintage model, complete with brass lamps and running-board. I felt sure they'd ripped it off: for one thing, they were taking off the number plates.

This second *bogan* is uncultured, boorish, and associated with a lower socio-economic class. The *bogan* is usually male, although a *boganness* occasionally appears. No doubt many *bogans* are 'aspirational', but an article in the *Courier-Mail* in January 2001 warns 'once a bogan, always a bogan':

I cannot fault my upbringing in Brisbane's outer suburbs—but when you hit your early 20s the pressure is on to bury your bogan past and go for a classier image. ... But no matter how well you conceal your inner-bogan, there will always be people ... out there ready to blow your cover.

The origin of *bogan* is unknown. Some have argued that the term may derive from the Bogan River and district in western New South Wales ('a person who is further west than a westie?'), but this is far from certain, and it seems more likely to be an unrelated coinage.

metrosexual  
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senior moment  
Sudoku  
dishlicker  
cyberstalking  
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