



Balenciaga's Destroyed Shoe Evolution: How Demna Made Distressed Sneakers a Luxury Item



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In 2022, Balenciaga's "destroyed" Paris sneaker sparked online outrage. Priced at \$1,850, the high-top canvas shoes appeared trashed, shredded, faded and grimy beyond repair. But the images that went viral only told half the story. Those extreme pairs were part of a limited run of 100. The standard editions, still distressed but less scorched-earth, retailed for \$495 to \$625, according to the brand. The backlash was immediate. But for Demna, Balenciaga's creative director, who is about to make his exit from the brand, the message was clear: luxury didn't need to be pristine.



The sneaker campaign was a preview of the mud-slicked world to come. Months later, Demna's now-infamous summer 2023 runway — staged in a dirt pit — brought the same scuffed, soiled ethos to eveningwear, accessories and yes, shoes. "We have a whole department now that ages and makes things dirty," Demna said backstage, as reported by WWD. To him, the act of distressing wasn't a shortcut, but rather, craft. The Paris



sneaker's raw seams and abrasions suggested longevity, rebellion and critique.

However, that message didn't resonate with everyone in the same way. Critics across Reddit, X and fashion media accused the brand of letting the wealthy "cosplay poverty," spending thousands to mimic the wear of shoes that, for others, come from necessity, not aesthetic. One viral tweet referred to it as "poverty as costume," while outlets questioned what it means to sell artificial struggle as an aspiration. Still, Balenciaga remained committed to the visual language of distress — refining it, expanding it and doubling down across collections.

That same philosophy appeared again in June 2025, this time in Demna's final footwear offerings for the brand. The Hamptons sneaker — part of Balenciaga's fall 2025 collection — was billed as a skate shoe reimagined "through an artisanal lens," available in varying degrees of pre-wear: Clean, Medium Worn-Out and Worn-Out. The all-leather style retained its shape but showed scuffs, creases and graffiti-laced laces — subtle evolutions of the Paris sneaker's original concept.



Balenciaga Hamptons sneaker in Medium Worn-Out (left) and Clean. Balenciaga

A week later, the Balenciaga x Puma collaboration hit stores, featuring a Destroyed Speedcat with a soft, collapsing upper and cut-off Formstrip. Originally designed in 1999 for Formula 1 drivers, the Speedcat's "Destroyed" revival was stripped of athletic function and repurposed as a fashion artifact — pliable, softened and intentionally undone.



Balenciaga's most controversial shoe trend has now become one of its most consistent. Over the past three years, Demna has used abrasion as both an aesthetic and a statement. As Demna moves on to Gucci, the Destroyed sneaker remains one of his signature contributions — a scuffed-up symbol of a decade-long career spent redefining the rules from the sole up.