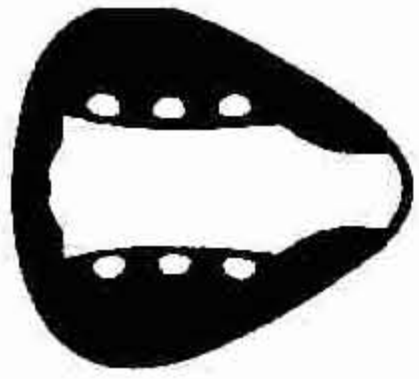


# TRUE WEST



**With two hit albums and a classic Western style, Jason Aldean vies for newcomer honors at this week's CMA Awards**

**BY JEAN E. PALMIERI**

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Jason Aldean is not exactly the high-fashion type.

Rather than runway looks from Thom Browne or Dolce & Gabbana, the country music artist is more at home in well-worn Wrangler jeans and Resistol hats.

"My trademark is my straw hat," Aldean says during a recent photo shoot with DNR.

That trademark look was created when Aldean was getting ready to be photographed for his self-titled debut album in 2005. The singer felt like there was something missing and took a quick trip to a Tractor Supply Co. where he picked up a \$20 Resistol straw hat. Now, that hat has become his signature, along with his skintight Wranglers that he personalizes by getting them tailored to make them more tapered. "I have skinny legs," he says with a shrug.

Although offstage he prefers baggy jeans, T-shirts and baseball caps, onstage he opts for 7 Diamonds contemporary, Western-inspired shirts, vintage concert T's—"eBay is a great place to find those," he says—well-worn Justin boots, leather and/or silver accessories and the occasional leather jacket. "Onstage, my jeans are a lot tighter," he adds. "Offstage I'm not as slick—more like something I picked up off the floor and put on."

Aldean says he only wears a suit jacket "a couple of times a year" during awards shows. And so it's safe to assume he will sport one Wednesday night during the Country Music Association Awards in Nashville, where he will be vying for the New Artist of the Year award against Kellie Pickler, Lady Antebellum, Rodney Atkins and James Otto. Aldean is also scheduled to perform "She's Country," the first single from his upcoming album, at the show.

If he wins, the CMA award will join the one he captured at the Academy of Country Music last year as Top New Male Vocalist.

"During my acceptance speech at the ACMs," Aldean says, "I was thinking about guys like Merle Haggard, who I'd seen on that show and who went on to have monster careers. It means the music industry in Nashville believes you're the next guy." Aldean says it's "a big deal just to be nominated, and if I win, it will feel like country music has taken notice."

With his touring schedule and frequent radio play, Aldean is hard to miss on the country music scene today. When he started out, he was on the road 200 days a year, a schedule that he has scaled back to 150–170 dates annually. "My oldest daughter just started school and I try to be home for anything important," he says. In addition to his five-year-old, Keeley, Aldean and his wife, Jessica, have a one-year-old daughter named Kendyl. "It's a little tougher for my family to come out on the road with me now," he says.

Aldean, 31, has been playing music since he was 14, entering talent concerts in his hometown of Macon, Ga. After high school he decided to pursue a music career instead of going to college to play baseball. "I couldn't see going to school for another four years," he recalls. "Putting a band together sounded like more fun. It probably wasn't a very smart idea, but it's worked out."



Leather jacket by  
**BOSS ORANGE,**  
cotton jeans by  
**WRANGLER.**

Cotton/spandex  
shirt by 7 DIAMONDS,  
cotton jeans by  
WRANGLER.

