

## Who Invented Velcro?

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Updated October 30, 2017

Before the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century, people lived in a Velcro-less world where zippers were standard and shoes had to be laced. All that changed though on one lovely summer day in 1941 when an amateur mountaineer and inventor named George de Mestral decided to take his dog for a nature hike.

De Mestral and his faithful companion both returned home covered with burrs, the plant seed-sacs that clung to animal fur as a way to spread to fertile new planting grounds. He noticed his dog was covered in the stuff. De Mestral was a Swiss engineer who was naturally curious so he took a sample of the many burrs stuck to his pants and placed them under his [microscope](#) to see how the properties of the burdock plant allowed it stick to certain surfaces. Perhaps, he thought, they can be used for something useful.

Upon closer examination, it was the small hooks that enabled the seed-bearing burr to cling so stubbornly to the tiny loops in the fabric of his pants. It as during this eureka moment that De Mestral smiled and thought something along the lines of "I will design a unique, two-sided fastener, one side with stiff hooks like the burrs and the other side with soft loops like the fabric of my pants. I will call my invention 'velcro' a combination of the word velour and crochet. It will rival the [zipper](#) in its ability to fasten."

De Mestral's idea was met with resistance and even laughter, but the inventor was undeterred. He worked with a weaver from a textile plant in France to perfect a fastener by experimenting with materials that would hook and loop in a similar manner. Through trial and error, he realized that nylon when sewn under infrared light formed tough hooks for the burr side of the fastener. The discovery led to a completed design that he patented in 1955.

He would eventually form Velcro Industries to manufacture and distribute his invention. In the 1960s, Velcro fasteners made its way to outer space as [Apollo astronauts](#) wore them to keep items like pens and equipment from floating away while in zero-gravity. In time, the product became kind of a household name as companies like Puma used them in shoes to replace laces. Shoe makers Adidas and Reebok would soon follow. During de Mastral's lifetime, his

company sold an average of over 60 million yards of Velcro per year. Not bad for an invention inspired by mother nature.

Today you can't technically buy velcro because the name is the registered trademark for the Velcro Industries' product, but you can have all the velcro brand hook and loop fasteners you need. This distinction was done on purpose and illustrates a problem inventors often face. Many words used frequently in everyday language were once trademarks, but eventually become generic terms. Well-known examples include escalator, thermos, cellophane and nylon. The problem is that once trademarked names becomes commonplace enough, the U.S. Courts can deny exclusive rights to the trademark.