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CAMEL HISTORY

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How and why the brand was launched.

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Camel History

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It was once said that Richard Joshua Reynolds could see farther ahead than most people could see behind them."\$FL

That kind of foresight by the founder of Reynolds Tobacco Co. led to an event in 1913 that changed the tobacco industry forever: Camel cigarettes were introduced.\$FL

Although most smokers in those days rolled their own, there were about 50 manufactured brands competing for available business. However, developed as regional or local brands, those cigarettes offered a limited choice. They generally were made of straight Turkish or a single domestic tobacco, or were a mixture that tasted heavily Turkish. None captured the public's favor.\$FL

While his competitors scoffed at the notion that any cigarette could have nationwide appeal, Reynolds was determined to blend one that would win America's taste.\$FL

[] Reynolds, the innovator

A firm believer in product innovation, Reynolds had made a name for himself and his company by producing chewing and smoking tobacco brands that quickly gained national popularity. He was convinced there must be a market for a cigarette that combined the best qualities of American and Turkish tobaccos.\$FL

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His quest required two years of researching and experimenting with different tobacco blends. In 1913, with initial problems of acquiring new machinery resolved, the company began producing cigarettes. Not one to pin all his hopes on a single product, Reynolds test-marketed four brands.\$FL

The clear winner was Camel, the only one of the four to offer an original formula. It was blended largely of a flue-cured bright tobacco with Turkish leaf added for taste and aroma. But its most distinctive feature was a sweetened burley, prepared much as it was for use in plug tobacco, but never used that way in a cigarette. Maryland tobacco was later added for its slow-burning qualities.\$FL

[] Major advertising campaign

When Reynolds first sampled the cigarette, he is said to have been so pleased with its taste that he said, "I'll back it with every cent I've got."\$FL

In December 1914, Reynolds broke with regional marketing tradition and hired N.W. Ayer & Son, a prominent advertising agency to introduce Camel cigarettes nationwide. The advertising campaign began with the famous "teaser ads," which appeared in local newspapers a few days before Camel was to go on sale in a community.\$FL

The first advertisement contained one word, "CAMELS." The second carried a sentence, "The CAMELS are coming!" The third proclaimed, "Tomorrow there'll be more CAMELS in this town than in all Asia and Africa combined!" These three ads had a bold profile of the camel as it appears on the package.\$FL

The last ad ran the day the cigarette arrived and announced, "CAMEL cigarettes are here!" The camel profile was smaller on this ad, which gave information about the price and quality of the cigarettes.\$FL

Soon afterward, a two-page Camel spread appeared in [555]The Saturday Evening Post[555], marking the first time that magazine had advertised cigarettes. The Camel campaign is considered to be one of the most ingenious in advertising history.\$FL

Reynolds also made pricing history by offering 20 Camel cigarettes in a pack for 10 cents. Smokers were paying 15 cents for most other brands, and sometimes as much as 25 cents.\$FL

[] Camels sweep the nation

Camel's success was phenomenal. The brand bounded from fourth to first place in five years. Reynolds Tobacco Company sold more than 425 million Camel cigarettes in 1914. Nearly 21 billion Camels were sold in 1919, capturing about 40 percent of the nation's cigarette business.\$FL

Reynolds did not live to see the Camel's full triumph. He died in 1918 at age 68.\$FL

Camel's sweeping success made believers of rival manufacturers. They scurried to develop and market brands that could compete. Through the 1920s and '30s, Camel rode the crest of a fierce marketing battle in the cigarette industry.\$FL

During the 1920s, consumer demand for Camels was so great that Reynolds Tobacco was forced to expand its factories. The cigarette was a favorite of American soldiers in both World Wars, and Camel smokers in the 1940s included such famous figures as President Franklin D. Roosevelt.\$FL

Until 1950 when filter cigarettes began a rise in the U.S., Camel was either No. 1 or very near the top. The brand ended 1987 in fifth place among leading American brands.

[]How Camel got its name

For his products, Reynolds preferred short, simple names that were easily pronounced and illustrated with a picture. He also wanted his special cigarette to have a name with an Oriental connotation, a fashion of the day. The company's staff considered numerous names including "Nabob," "Kismet" and "Kamel." Reynolds himself made the final decision. "Camel," it would be.\$FL

In 1913 when names were being considered, a Reynolds lawyer learned that cigarettes under the "Red Camel" name were being manufactured by a small businessman in New York. In order to protect his Camel name, Reynolds promptly paid \$300 to buy out the Red Kamel brand. He later spent \$3,000 to buy it a second time from a Philadelphia company, which also had purchased the Red Kamel brand from the New York businessman.\$FL

Camel's first package design had a major problem. The dromedary on the label against a background of pyramids and palm trees was an unappealing creature with a drooping neck, two-pronged hoofs and an awkward stance. Company executives questioned whether the one-humped beast was indeed a camel, but they learned from [555]Encyclopedia Britannica[555] that a dromedary could be called a camel.\$FL

The package was soon redesigned bearing the image of a Barnum & Bailey Circus dromedary named "Old Joe," which today is one of the most famous product trademarks in the world. Reynolds consented when his young secretary, Roy C. Haberkern, asked permission to get photographs of a two-humped circus camel and a dromedary to use as guides for improving the label.\$FL

The circus superintendent at first refused Haberkern's request to take pictures, but cooperated after Haberkern suggested that Reynolds Tobacco might stop its practice of closing operations for the circus.\$FL

As the story goes, when Haberkern and a photographer arrived at the circus grounds, the superintendent brought out Old Joe, the dromedary, and a camel. The camel posed willingly, but Old Joe refused to hold still and got a slap on the nose from the superintendent. The animal reacted by raising his tail, throwing back his ears and closing his eyes. The photographer snapped the picture, which was an immediate choice for the Camel package.\$FL

The picture of a camel was chosen as a package symbol not just because it depicted the brand name, according to Dr. Nannie M. Tilley. Tilley says in her book, [555]The R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company[555], that the camel was selected for its yellowish color and that yellow was selected as the pack's dominant color "much on the principle that inspired yellow on taxicabs as the color most likely to attract attention."\$FL

Another distinctive feature of the Camel package was a statement that read, "Don't look for premiums or coupons, as the cost of the tobaccos blended in Camel Cigarettes prohibits the use of them."\$FL

While other cigarettes then on the market offered gifts or package souvenirs, Reynolds--in a stroke of genius--decided simply to emphasize Camel's superior taste. The phrase "Choice Quality" was added to a side panel.\$FL

Today's Camel package looks much the same as it did 75 years ago. In 1958, when the company tried to modernize the pack, Camel smokers raised such a protest that the original design was reinstated.\$FL

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