

HISTORY OF THE CAMEL

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In 1902, Rudyard Kipling penned a story about a camel with an attitude problem. The camel, of all the beasts of burden, was singularly reluctant to work. His response to all requests for help was, "Humpf." So a wizard gave him what he asked for. And the resultant hump has become the animal's trademark.

Current illustrated editions of Kipling's fable make marvelous use of the camel's elongated face to convey his disdain for labor. The curled lips with which he sneers and long nose down which he peers are perfect for conveying that camel's haughty attitude.

In 1913, successful entrepreneur Richard Joshua Reynolds also found the camel to be expressive of an attitude he was trying to convey for a new cigarette brand. At the time, things evocative of the Middle East were all the rage, and in his effort to develop the first national brand of cigarettes in the United States, Reynolds sought to capitalize on that popularity. He considered a number of names -- Osman, Kismet, Oracle, Red Kamel and Camel. Camel won.

Working from written descriptions in the Encyclopedia Britannica and from their own mental images, Reynolds' packaging designers tried to draw a camel to appear on the cigarette pack. Perhaps the first "camel designed by committee," the rendering was not terribly accurate.

Fortunately, the Barnum & Bailey circus was in town, and Reynolds' secretary and a photographer got permission to photograph the both the circus' two-humped Bactrian camel and one-humped dromedary. The Bactrian camel posed willingly, but the dromedary, Old Joe, wouldn't hold still. So his trainer slapped him on the nose. In true Kiplingesque fashion, Old Joe raised his tail, threw back his ears and closed his eyes as the shutter snapped. Frozen in time, that is how he appears today, 78 years later, on the roughly ___ million packs of Camel cigarettes sold annually worldwide.

The camel quickly became the unofficial mascot of R.J. Reynolds' company, appearing on company publications and facilities, and spawning a series of spin-off associations: even the company cafeteria is called the "Caravan Room."

Over the years, company employees have collected camel sculptures, photographs, lithographs, paintings and other desert memorabilia that now decorate virtually every floor of the company's headquarters complex in Winston-Salem, N.C. The annual lobby Christmas tree is decorated with camels, and several camel-shaped topiaries grace public areas of the buildings. Employees speak fondly of "Old Joe," and have grown accustomed to seeing him act as a company spokesman in videotapes, United Way campaigns and the like.

The Camel pack even created its own mystique. Magic tricks using the pack as a prop were developed and distributed to smokers. And rumors were passed for years that the truly

discerning eye could find a naked man, or alternatively, a naked woman, hidden within the illustration of the camel on the pack. The company staunchly denies the charge: "The only thing naked on that pack is Old Joe himself," says a spokesman.

Sixty-one years after his debut on the package, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco's French subsidiary commissioned new artwork that would bring Old Joe forward in time. British artist Nicholas Price created the image of Old Joe's face bursting through the front of a pack of Camel cigarettes. Because of the happy countenance on his expressive face, he was called the "smiling camel." The ads first appeared in France in 1974, and subsequently in several other European countries.

New cigarette advertising constraints in France were enacted in 1976, and the smiling camel found himself in court, defending his status as an "emblem" for the brand. Company statements at the time said, "Regardless of its physiomy, Reynolds claims that the emblem is and remains a camel, smiling or not." They claimed that the smiling camel was "a symbol for a non-conformist, slightly satirical attitude to life" and that "R.J. Reynolds Tobacco ... has adapted its advertising to French wit."

Press reports of the case called the smiling Joe an "affable fellow ... grinning from ads." Less flatteringly, he was referred to in one newspaper as a "whiskered, bug-eyed version [that] is the same old guy, just made a little more lively."

The case was largely decided in Old Joe's favor, with some concessions on how premium items, like lighters, bearing his likeness could be advertised in France. He continued to appear on cigarette premium items sporadically throughout the 1980s in the United States and in other international markets. In recent years, posters of the original French design have brought more than \$5,000 at art auctions.

In 1987, the team of Reynolds Tobacco marketers assigned to the Camel brand faced a once-in-a-brand's-lifetime opportunity: the upcoming 75th birthday of Old Joe and Camel cigarettes.

By then, the brand's image had become dated, and its once-huge market share was dwarfed by larger American brands like Philip Morris' Marlboro and RJR's own Winston and Salem. The team cast about for an image that would simultaneously celebrate the brand's 75th birthday and update Camel's image among current smokers.

The smiling Old Joe was the natural choice. It had been warmly received by smokers each time it had been used in the past. Consumer tests with the concept prior to the 1988 introduction of the "birthday" campaign were overwhelmingly positive.

"We tried all sorts of expressions on his face, and drew him from different angles, but we kept coming back to the French smiling camel," says Julie Staton, art director for the Camel campaign developed by Trone Advertising to celebrate the 75th birthday. "It had been such a hit with smokers, we finally decided, why reinvent a new face?"

"The French version was drawn somewhat crudely, so we Americanized it, made it more 3-D, and made greater use of highlights and shadows than the French art," she says. "We wanted Joe to quickly convey a sense of self-assurance, irreverence and lightheartedness."

The new Joe met with great success among smokers. Consumer-recall scores on the ads were high, and even smokers aged 50 and over, whom the marketers worried would be put off by a change in the traditional ads, reported a positive response to Joe. As the birthday year wore on, RJR's Camel brand team opted to continue using Old Joe into his 76th year and beyond.

Joe has spent the last two years waterskiing, lounging in hammocks, riding motorcycles, shooting pool and generally being what the advertising copy calls a "smooth character."

Recently, the character has come under fire from critics of the tobacco industry, who generally have two complaints: that as an illustration or cartoon, he overtly appeals to young people to begin smoking; and that some people believe his face is a phallic symbol.

On the latter charge, art director Staton says, "We never saw male genitalia in the art at all -- none of us did. And nobody spent more time with that art than we did. The first time we heard of it was when we read it in a trade magazine, and we were amazed. I drew those ads, and that was never in my mind. That was never in the instructions given to me by the Reynolds people. All that illustration is is an update of the French artwork, which itself was an update of pack graphics," she says.

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. marketers concur.

"It's ludicrous. Old Joe is a camel, and he's been part of that pack for 78 years," says David N. Iauco, senior vice president of marketing for Reynolds Tobacco. "That face is a camel's face and nothing more. If anti-smoking organizations have a problem with it, they can take it up with God. He's the one that designed the original face."

Iauco is equally vehement about the charges that the Camel ads are aimed at making children start smoking.

"It's simply untrue. We don't want children to smoke, and we don't market to children. We've put into place multi-million dollar programs to make it more difficult for kids to have access to cigarettes.

"What the anti-smoking organizations neglect to tell people is that time and again, studies have shown that cigarette advertising does not make children smoke. Even Surgeon General Koop acknowledged that," Iauco says. "The biggest influence on kids is their parents, siblings and peers. The presence or absence of ads does not affect youth smoking rates." Iauco cites several foreign studies done in countries where cigarette advertising is banned or severely restricted to support his contentions.

Somehow, the unlikely camel has found himself surrounded by controversy since "the beginning of years, when the world was so new and all," as Kipling wrote.

As for Old Joe, he remains ever so slightly above the fray, looking down from billboards with an attitude that almost says, "Humpf."

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