

ARTICLE #1: LUCKY STRIKE HISTORY

Remember When?

Lucky Strike an American Standard for More Than Seventy-Five Years

In retrospect, the Lucky Strike line of tobacco products, owned internationally by Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, a member of the BAT union of tobacco companies and successor to American Tobacco Company, seems destined to have become the American cultural icon that it is today. With its echoes of the fabled "lucky strikes" of nineteenth-century California gold prospectors, the Lucky Strike brand and its bull's-eye logo have captured a uniquely American look and spirit for more than 75 years.

Cough Syrups and Clever Slogans: The Early Years

The brand name "Lucky Strike" was first registered in the United States in 1871, for R.A. Patterson's Virginia plug and pipe tobacco. After the 1865 conclusion of the American Civil War, the tobacco industry of the southern United States began a rapid rise, and Patterson, a Virginia doctor who had served in the army of the seceding Confederate States of America under the celebrated "gentleman general" Robert E. Lee, was one of the modern industry's early entrepreneurs. Tradition has it that Patterson's "Lucky Strike" tobacco's unique flavor came from the addition of Dr. Patterson's homemade cough syrup to the blend.

So, in the early years of this century, when George Washington Hill, the flamboyant president of Lucky Strike's parent company, was looking for a name for a new flavored blend of burley tobacco, "Lucky Strike," with its romantic gold-rush associations as well as the suggestion of an arrow hitting "on target," was an ideal choice.

In 1917, Lucky Strike cigarettes were introduced into the American market with the soon to-be-famous slogan, "Lucky Strike, It's Toasted!" Competitors scoffed at these advertisements — since all tobacco is dried, or "toasted," at some point in the preparation process — but the idea captured the popular imagination and "It's Toasted!" was a hugely successful slogan used for many years to come.

Indeed, in the years which followed its introduction, Lucky Strike became — and remains — one of America's best-loved brands, in no small part due to the combined imaginative powers of G.W. Hill and advertising genius Albert Lasker, who also created that quintessentially American entertainment, the soap opera. Together, Lasker and Hill developed a series of slogans which

immediately became part of the American popular culture landscape of the day.

Among these mottoes were the well-known "Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco," which was later abbreviated to "L.S./M.F.T." and which appeared on Lucky Strike packets for decades. Another celebrated slogan was "Nature in the Raw Is Seldom Mild," which was accompanied in print advertisements by graphic and anecdotal celebrations of civilization's virtues. Other advertisements in this era featured photographs of tobacco plantations around the American South; "Lucky Strike pays 40% more for its tobacco just to get the best and mildest leaves," read one. As with the "It's Toasted!" motto, the emphasis of these campaigns was the unique quality of and special care taken in preparing Lucky Strike tobaccos.

Between the Wars:

Movie Stars and Crooners Make Lucky Strike a Household Name

But Lucky Strike is most often associated in the American mind with the especially optimistic and high-spirited period in American cultural history spanning from the glamorous late 1930s through the rugged and patriotic 1940s into the affluent and secure 1950s.

Early Lucky Strike spokespersons included numerous European women of artistic fame and high society. These elegant figures were superseded by Hollywood film stars, "America's own royalty." The lovely Jean Harlow, dramatic Joan Crawford, comic actress Myrna Loy, and the dashing Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., were among the numerous movie stars who served as glamorous spokespersons for the brand.

Al Jolson, the "father" of all-American art form ragtime music and star of "The Jazz Singer," the first-ever "talking" movie, joined actress Constance Talmadge in reminding audiences to "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet!" And, in the film classic "The Maltese Falcon," Humphrey Bogart's "hard-boiled" Detective Sam Spade smoked only Luckies.

Other celebrated figures who associated Lucky Strike with adventure in the popular imagination include Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean, and U.S. Navy Captain George Fried, who claimed that Luckies had helped him to maintain "nerve control" during a much publicized rescue-at-sea mission.

Also during this era, the Lucky Strike brand sponsored "Lucky Radio Shows" featuring American composer George Gershwin and the first-ever "Hit parade." Frank Sinatra, renowned singer of classics such as "You Make Me Feel So Young," "Love Is Here to Stay," "New York, New York," and "My Way," later led the "Lucky Strike Hit Parade."

World War II: Lucky Strike Goes to War

Then came World War II, and, in 1941, Lucky Strike traded its traditional camouflage-green package for a newly redesigned white one. Since the green color of the old packaging was needed to produce army uniforms, it was said, Lucky Strike had patriotically "donated" the color to the government for the benefit of the armed forces abroad. "Lucky Strikes," declared G.W. Hill, "have gone to war." It was a sentiment warmly received both by those going off to battle and those supporting the war effort at home.

This declaration echoed an earlier campaign on behalf of Bull Durham loose tobacco, a sister brand to Lucky Strike. During World War I, Percival S. Hill, father of G.W. Hill and then president of Lucky Strike's parent company, had announced, in a full-page letter to the public in the *Saturday Evening Post*, that the U.S. government had requested that the entire output of Bull Durham tobacco be reserved for "the boys" on the front lines: "I know that you will not forget the little muslin sack — gone for the moment on its mission of hope and inspiration to our boys in the trenches," he concluded, "'Bull' will come back, with ribbons of honor. Have no fear."

On the other side of the Atlantic, Lucky Strikes were so popular among European and American soldiers alike that they were used as a form of currency. When doubts about the value of paper money became so acute that a quasi-barter economy developed in Europe, Lucky Strikes held their value.

Redefining Lucky Strike's Distinctive "Look"

The challenge of redesigning the Lucky Strike "look" fell to noted designer Raymond Loewy. Company legend has it that G.W. Hill arrived one day unannounced at Loewy's office. Without even taking off his hat, Hill declared, "I've heard that you don't like the Lucky Strike package, and, what's more, that you think you can design a better one. I just don't believe it." Loewy replied, coolly and simply, that he would be happy to bet \$50,000 on his ability to create a new and improved package for Lucky Strike products.

After the two traded further jibes, Loewy delivered on his promise, impressing Hill and creating an American classic. The original green was replaced by a pure white suggesting the purity and freshness of the package's contents. On this background, Loewy placed the famous bull's-eye design, a red circle surrounded by olive green and black rings. Ingeniously, Loewy insisted that this design appear on *both sides* of the package, so the the brand's unique logo could be seen, no matter which way the pack lay or was displayed.

By the 1940s, Lucky Strike was probably the most recognizable brand on the tobacconist's shelf. The subject of a 1938 book entitled *The Story of Lucky Strike*, Luckies became so familiar that the pack was even the subject of a painting by noted American artist Stuart Davis.

It is no surprise, then, that a number of other products, including other cigarettes, tried to copy its distinctive style, most often by using the striking bull's-eye image. One imitator used a graphic almost identical to the Lucky Strike bull's-eye with a satirical version of the "It's Toasted!" slogan: "Hotter than a Firecracker!" This imitator relied on the company's good humor for protection, but others were not so fortunate, like Lucky Strike Toilet Paper!

The real Lucky Strike pack, containing one of the eight varieties of Lucky Strike cigarette currently available, has been sold more than fifty billion times around the globe, from Kansas to Kazakhstan, from Arizona to Azerbaijan, and has been supported by advertising reflecting the brand's distinctive American heritage. No wonder 97 percent of Americans asked — and millions of others all over the world — are so familiar with the Lucky Strike brand!

The Lucky Strike brand is the property of Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Louisville, Kentucky, USA, a member of the BAT union of tobacco companies and the successor to the American Tobacco Company.

Suggested photo/graphic: oldest available package (original 1917, if available); 1941 Loewy package redesign; 1994 packaging.

Alternate photo/graphic: oldest available advertisement (original 1917, if available); 1930s Jean Harlow ad, if available, 1941 Loewy package redesign; 1995 packaging.