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adidas: The Birth of the Three Stripes

It is said a picture can tell a thousand words and for a designer or someone trying to introduce an idea, is absolutely imperative. As a matter of fact, A thousand words may not even be enough. Companies and designers together have to captivate or intrigue an audience using a logo, a symbol adopted by an organization to identify its products, uniform, vehicles, etc. In the case of adidas, the three stripes is used to identify clothes, backpacks, and other types of merchandise, but mainly shoes for a wide array of sports and occasions. The three stripes logo is extremely simplistic yet highly memorable. Is it memorable *because* of its simplicity? Or is it something more? The three stripes logo of adidas has an inspiring, peculiar, and humble history to tell.

Now, despite how weird the word adidas sounds on its own, the origin of the name is really simple. In August 1949, “Adi Dassler registered his new shoe-making company, “adidas,” a simple, lowercase portmanteau of his shortened first and last names. It’s even implied that the lowercase “a” in the front of adidas hinted at some form of passivity. As not trying too hard to be noticed. In the 1920’s the sports fanatic and expert designer made his first pair of soccer shoes from scraps of things found in old World War I battlefields.” (Rachel Chambers, A Feud Between Two Brothers Leads to the Three Stripes)

By 1937, with his brother Rudolf Dassler, Adi was making thirty models of sports for eleven different sports. Hitler's rise to power was a good thing for the Dassler brothers. Hitler’s promotion of sports clubs made shoe orders flood in. Even with a good amount of business growth because of the rising sales, there was tension created between the two brothers because of their different political views. In 1945, Rudolf was fingered as a traitor when Allied troops came to arrest him because of his affiliation with Nazis. Even after he was released, the family was

broken up and the company was divided between the two brothers, Adi and Rudolf. Adi kept the two larger factories with which he tried to differentiate his company from Rudolf's company: Ruda which is now known as Puma.

The newly formed West German soccer team needed a sponsor (Rudolf and his fiery temper had already landed—and lost—the contract). Adi took on the team who won the World Cup on July 4th, 1954. After that inspiring victory for his brand, he thought of three stripes, which was supposed to be Mountains that indicate aims and goals lying ahead. This logo was made to motivate the athletes through a design that adds elegance through its simplicity. He was still not sure how to emulate these three stripes on his products. “In 1967, Adolf 'Adi' Dassler started using three stripes to identify its footwear. But it was not until 1971, when the trefoil logo was unveiled, that Adidas had a logo design that would become legendary. The three-leaf shape in figure 1 is meant to represent the main landmasses of the Americas, Europe and Africa, and Asia respectively.” (“How the Adidas logo earned its stripes”)

In 1997, the mountain logo (refer to Fig.2) which represented his original idea about mountains indicating goals was introduced. “With the trefoil a fashion success, a new logo was needed for sporting products. Originally crafted by creative director Peter Moore in 1990, the performance logo was initially used on the company's Equipment range of sporting goods. The three stripes come directly from those seen on early Adidas sports shoes, but also form the shape of a mountain, which represents the challenges athletes face.” You can see the process leading to the logo in Fig. 3. (“How the Adidas logo earned its stripes”)

In conclusion, Dassler wanted something that would be instantly associated with his company when athletes used his footwear in international athletic competitions. It was a brilliantly simple product placement idea and has been a part of the Adidas brand ever since. The history behind the Adidas' three stripes logo is inspiring, peculiar, and humbling. The logo, unlike the name, is not so black and white. The three stripes not only represent mountains, but also the trials and tribulations that Adi Dassler had to go through while dealing with his brother, possibly being a Nazi, the growth of his new company, and differentiating himself from Rudolf and Puma.



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Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Works Cited

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