

GENESIS OF A TRADEMARK

Trademarks and symbols are expressions of organizational individuality. Their creation and choice is a major decision for any enterprise. Creation of a trademark challenges the best talents of the advertising man.

The story of the selection of the trademark of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited, would always rank amongst the most creative challenges for an organization which, having a well established corporate image, had to seek a new identity to fall in line with national objectives and aspirations. Never before has such an opportunity come to an oil company, which had to devise and develop a new identity through indigenous talent ingenuity and resources.

The strength, sustenance and success of the new 'H P' trademark, would now largely depend upon the communication programme, that would merchandise its products, services, people, advertising, and herald the beginning of a new era—business expertise and efficiency in service of the nation.

The historical prelude to the selection, dates back to March 14, 1974, when the government of India signed an agreement with ESSO and acquired 74 per cent shares of its business in India. At that time, the permitted

period for complete changeover from ESSO to 'H P' was just six months.* The logistic problem was herculean—that of first developing and deciding the new trademark, thereafter conducting the search to ascertain its availability for registration, then fabricating and replacing nearly 2000-odd master signs at petrol stations, all over the country. Yet in a matter of two months, the most important requisite had been accomplished. A new 'H P' trademark had been successfully evolved and approved.

The way it was done makes a good case study.

In April 1974, a Brands, Trademarks and Designs committee was constituted with the specific objective of developing and finalising a suitable trademark for the new corporation. The project was undertaken in two parts.

Employee participation

First, a contest "A challenge to your creativeness" was announced for all employees. The contest generated great enthusiasm and widespread participation. In less than a month 600 employees submitted over 1,600 suggestions for a new trademark. Suggestions were received from all levels—from a tank-lorry driver to department heads. It clearly highlighted the keen sense of belonging, of involvement, of the spontaneous desire of all employees to be associated in the creation of an identity of their new corporation.

* Subsequently this period was extended by another six months.

Time being of essence, simultaneously several leading advertising agencies and graphic designers were invited to make their recommendations for the new verbal and visual corporate identity. All suggestions and recommendations were carefully evaluated and assessed in relation to the checkpoints necessary for an effective trademark.

The most fundamental checkpoint was that of the *suitability* of the design. Was it compatible with company's purpose and general nature? Was the design a creative one to give it a *distinctive* dimension? Did the design show a

sense of *contemporaneity* — will it still appear attractive in five or ten years time or did it reflect a current vogue? Did the design impart a strong lasting impression to give it *memorability*? Did the design suggest that the company had a sense of responsibility — to project an image of *reliability*? Did it fulfil the need of media suitability? Did the design have personality for both national and international requirements?



Designs from employees of H P which came up for consideration



Designs submitted by two agencies



Some international oil company trademarks

The selected design does meet most of the basic graphic and functional requirements. This would contribute substantially in fulfilling the image objectives and projections.

The target audience of the new corporation would still be the same. The trademark would be required to convey successfully that the new corporation was dependable, reliable efficient, businesslike and service-oriented nationally owned and yet an independent entity — not bureaucratic, but innovative and alive.

The semantics were also considered. For maximum impact and association, both the spoken word and visual concept are important. The combination of the right words and an effective visual design makes a trademark distinctive and it then serves as a uni-

versal language in identifying the company in the national and world trade.

Many names were suggested and considered: SUPERTEL, HINDOL OLCO, HINDEN, SOLAR, CHEETAH, HINDPET, SFURTI etc. in the final analysis, the simplicity of using just the letters 'H' and 'P' were considered most desirable and suitable. Basically a trademark should be easy to read pronounce and remember. H P is short, crisp, easy to say, spell and recognize. It is closest to the name of the corporation.

Evolving the new Symbol

To an extent by using H P the new trademark got the rub-off advantage of an old well established English company: British Petroleum, which also uses just two letters: B P.

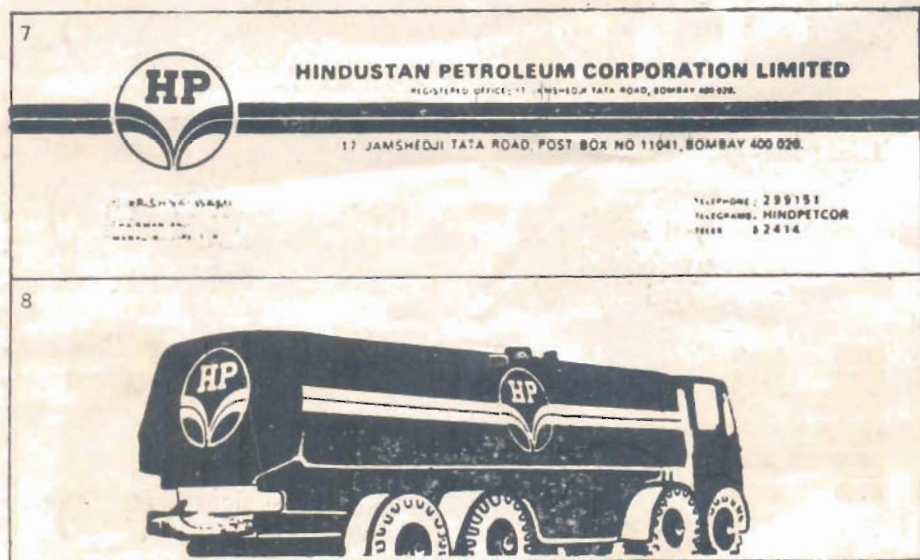


Fig 7 Letterhead specimen with distinctive layout Fig 8 Tank — lorry design — the bands integrate into the trademark design.

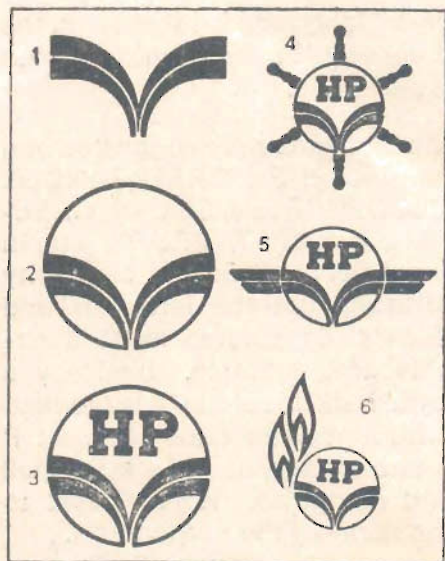


Fig. 1 A symbolic representation of spurt of oil energy coming out of earth. Fig. 2 The energy is circulated and distributed all round. Fig. 3 The composite of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited. Fig. 4 Symbolic use of the helm for marine service and products Fig. 5 Aviation service symbol—extension of the energy spurts into wings Fig. 6 Symbol for cooking gas with the distinctive twin LPG flames.

But just the letter H P by themselves have little impact. They have no dynamism. To strengthen it, a concept was necessary.

Concept: A symbolic representation of a spurt of oil energy coming out of the earth (fig. 1). It is then circulated and distributed all round (fig. 2). The composite identity with the letters HP (fig. 3) The new H P trademark is dynamic, flexible and businesslike. Compared to other international oil company trademarks it stand out with grace and distinction.

Colour makes a trademark more eloquent. It gives contrast and emphasis. It makes a design more

vibrant and memorable. The colour scheme for the H P trademark: letters H P in signal red and the spurt of energy and the circle in French blue on a white background.

The most significant quality of any trademark is in its ability in application. The H P trademark is perhaps most versatile in this respect (figs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.) No other oil company trademark, national or international, so easily and distinctively, lends itself for such an effective and aesthetic integration in its application. This is perhaps the greatest strength of the H P design.

The design for the symbolic representation of the spurt of oil energy coming out of the earth, was suggested by Sudarshan Dheer, a free-lance well-known graphic designer.

A flash appraisal of the new H P trademark design: its shape, sound, sense, colour, texture will create a spontaneous pre-disposition towards the corporation. The cold assessment of its products services, people and advertising will promote brand loyalty and continued goodwill for Hindustan Petroleum Corporation in the future. It would be a befitting tribute to the genesis of its new personality.

— Jagmohan Malhotra