NUNC EST bibendum !!!
UN MITO GRÁFICO DESDE 1898
EXPOSICIÓN

PRODUCE
MuVIM. Museo Valenciano de la Ilustración y la Modernidad

PATROCINA
Michelin España Portugal, S.A.
Manufacture Française des Pneumatiques Michelin

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This is the original article, full illustrated and written in Spanish language, as it was first published in 2005 in the book-catalogue *Nunc est bibendum!!... Un mito gráfico desde 1898*.

In next pages there are the published article in its English translation version, without images.

The old advertisements images were scanned from my own collection of original American magazine pages, which was shown at the Michelin Exhibition in Spain and France between 2005 and 2008.
The forgotten years
The american phase of Michelin in Milltown

Pau Medrano Bigas

In 1907, Michelin Tire & Co. acquired The International Rubber Co., a company dealing in rubber products in Milltown, a small town in the state of New Jersey, near New York. Using its well established presence in Europe as a springboard, it followed the example of the Italian subsidiary in Turin, the first factory built by the company outside France (1906), for its international expansion strategy. According to an advertisement in the American press dated March 1908, “(...) the factory in Milltown is the largest tire factory in America and there are both daytime and night time shifts thus production has been doubled during the last six months”.

A large number of French workers put their names down for the American adventure, moving with their families from the “parent company” in Clermont-Ferrand to the new headquarters. At the beginning of 1900, the transatlantic trip by boat took five or six weeks where the passengers travelled in third class without any kind of luxury. The offer of work, however, was not clouded by the tough working conditions nor by the lack of social protection in the United States: the salaries were five or six times higher than those in France.

As a family firm, Michelin exerted paternal control over its operators, an imported and qualified workforce most of whom were French. According to written statements by immigrants at that time, “The Michelin Company was a modern company which looked after its workers, with incentives for overtime, good paid holidays and their own pension plan as well. Such advantageous conditions meant there was no need for pressure from the unions”.

Michelin built homes to accommodate the first five hundred employees. As from 1919, a real neighbourhood with 53 bungalows was set up, which increased to 200 to improve the living conditions of the workers and their families. During this era the Milltown census recorded 2,573 inhabitants.
THE GREAT WAR AND THE BUSINESS BATTLES

A crucial fact conditioned the future of the French trademark: on 3rd August, 1914, Germany declared war on France, and Europe found itself engulfed in the Great War. The United States joined the conflict on 6th April, 1917, when the Senate declared war on Germany. The armistice of Compiegne, on 11th November of this same year, brought the conflict to an end.

During the conflict, the importation of natural rubber was rationed by half and American industries increased their consumption of recycled material. The priority demand for tires and military equipment with rubber parts –gas masks, sounding balloons, boot soles...– meant that it was compulsory for all manufacturers to produce for the government. The masculine workforce was scarce as a result of being called up and fuel was rationed. The car industry saw its production of vehicles fall by 50% in order to economise on steel.

Michelin was one of many companies put under this wartime pressure: it manufactured tires and military equipment and part of its staff originating from Europe left to join the fight in defence of their countries. The situation returned to normality in December 1918, when the government lifted the restrictions. In a climate of recovery and optimism, more than forty small tire companies were set up in 1919.

A comparative study of the 1920s, after various company mergers, ranked Michelin in 23rd place amongst tire manufacturers. At the top, well ahead of Michelin, were Goodyear, Goodrich, US Rubber, Firestone or Fisk. The second large group of manufacturers was headed by Ajax, Miller, Kelly-Springfield, Republic, McGraw, Mason, Pennsylvania, Mansfield, General, Daylon and Seiberling. On the list of medium-sized companies were Hood, Gillette, Cooper, Mohawk, Gates, Pharis, Michelin and Dunlop.

The recovery suffered a setback as a result of the economic recession between January 1920 and July 1921. This was followed by difficult years of uncertainty and industrial concentration that culminated in the Great Depression. In the tire sector the figures are enlightening: of the 166 companies existing in 1923, only 62 remained in 1929, This dropped to 35 in 1933.

THE END OF THE AMERICAN DREAM?

The Great Depression of 1930 put an end to Michelin’s American adventure. State protectionism of indigenous companies exacerbated the difficulties. Finally, the factory closed in the spring of this same year, leaving behind a community severely shaken by the situation, A large part of the population –Michelin employed more than 2000 men and women– did not have any other source of income other than the Micheiin salaries, and even depended indirectly on the company’s social support. This traumatic shift, in conjunction with the severity of the times, made many French workers return to their home villages. They left the remains of more than twenty years of tire manufacturing and business and social activities on American soil.
On 4th April, 1931, Andre Michelin died at the age of 78 leaving his brother Edouard to head the company that both had founded on 28th May, 1889 under the name of Michelin et Cie. He did not live to meet his objective of expanding to the new world.

Perhaps this defeat is the reason why the American phase of Michelin is virtually unknown. The complete dismantling of the factory and offices in Milltown meant that many archives, essential for piecing together the events of this time, were lost. America is faraway from Clermont-Ferrand and the 1920s are lost in time. What is left of Michelin’s presence in Milltown?

In the small town, the languages of English and French intermingled in streets with names such as Marquis de Lafayette, Debonis, Joffre, Foch, Renoux, Pardun or Desmet where parishioners attended the church of Our Lady of Lourdes. In the Michelin Park, still active today, the company baseball team—the Michelin Royals—competed in an intercompany league. The figure of Bibendum, the company’s corporate mascot, was emblazoned on facades and shop windows in the town. An enormous Bibendum wearing a chef’s hat and holding a saucepan and pot, advertised the town cafe...

After Michelin’s departure, various companies successively occupied the factory premises. At the present time, the complex of buildings is part of an urban restructuring project. For many, the mark left by Michelin is associated with the hard times of industrialisation, with factory closures and enormous economic and social upheaval; for others, it forms part of the historical legacy and bequest of a vital and hospitable town, formed by a mixture of immigration and cultures from faraway.

Nowadays, Milltown is a small and modern town with more than seven thousand inhabitants located between two large motorways which restrict its growth—surface area of 4.1 km²—, with good services and its own water and electricity companies.

**ADVERTISING IN THE PRESS**

The loss of the Michelin archives in Milltown and the little information that Michelin Clermont-Ferrand keeps with regard to that era, is partially compensated for by the legacy of the advertisements which appeared in the periodicals: between 1907 and 1929, more than 150 different advertisements were published in illustrated magazines such as *Life*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Literary Digest*, *Collier’s*, *Liberty*, *The Country Gentleman*, *The American Magazine*, *The Theatre*, *Country Life in America*, *Elks Magazine*, etc. Specialities of the sector can be added to those such as *Motor Age*, *Automotive Industries* or *Successful Farming*.

During that era, illustration continued to be the best tool for presenting concepts in images and using them to accompany texts. The reason being that printing techniques and the type of paper used by these mass publications limited photographic reproduction. As such, it was normal to commission renowned artists to draw illustrations thus bestowing their signature and prestige on the advertised product.
During the 1920s, the pages of the press were inundated with a multitude of advertisements with illustrated motifs. Amongst the campaigns led by the tire companies it is worth mentioning the work of Maxfield Parrish for Fisk Tires –1918–; the series of advertisements for the same trademark by the sought-after Norman Rockwell in 1924; the delicate designs by Laurence Fellows for Kelly-Springfield –1924-25–; the campaign by Walter Klett for General –1929–… , and the vast, however practically unknown works by Arthur N. Edrop for Michelin.

Likewise, a multitude of anonymous publicists, designers and typographers, illustrators and writers gave shape to the different campaigns, participating in the ferocious commercial fights amongst pioneering companies of the tire industry. Michelin’s abundant advertising presence in the American press can be classified into three basic phases, the first campaigns –1907-1916–; the second phase –1916-1926–; and the last phase –1927-1929–.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGNS (1907-1916)

From 1907 until 1910, Michelin placed advertisements in different publications. These were the first introductory gestures and were emphasised in the American production of the trademark. Michelin’s French roots were disregarded by not publicising them. These were advertisements using a small format –modules the size of a quarter or half page–, with a lot of text and classic Victorian illustrations in black and white with an impersonal style. They depicted drawings of tires and scenes with cars and motorists.

Nevertheless, the Michelin tire-man corporate mascot –named Bibendum– only made an appearance sporadically and always in standard drawings, imported from the “parent company” in Clermont-Ferrand and closely overseen by his creator Marius Rossillon “O’Galop” (1867-1946). These are sketches of an incipient corporative image, used in France, the rest of Europe... , and in America regardless. Between 1910 and 1916 there is a huge information vacuum. Nevertheless some advertisements in The Saturday Evening Post and in other American magazines already depicted Bibendum along with other motifs –tires, car races–. The design of the advertisement and the graphic depiction of Bibendum are directly inherited from the British press of this era, above all the one placed in The London Illustrated News between 1910 and 1918.

THE SECOND PHASE (1916-1926)

At the end of 1916, a different style took over the Michelin campaigns in the United States. It was an individual style and imposed its own rules regardless of the advertising that the company pursued in Europe and the United Kingdom. Perhaps it was the right moment to establish new advertising communication rules and thus battle on even ground in the peculiar American market for tires at that time.
This turnaround had its own name: Arthur Norman Edrop, illustrator and journalist who was in charge of designing, drawing—and in some cases even writing—for Michelin advertising. The “Edrop style” is patented in the majority of the advertisements and business objects that date back to between 1916 and 1926.

Apart from O’Galop, creator of Bibendum and illustrator of his numerous advertising adventures and battles, only Arthur N. Edrop carried out such detailed and constant work on the character. It was not in vain that he created illustrations for Michelin during these ten years of the mascot’s persistent make-overs. His work could be seen in press advertisements, pamphlets, small technical publications, enamelled plates and different objects. His style is recognisable in more than a hundred press advertisements, however his name only appears in about twenty.

His first advertisements appeared in the magazine Life, full page and in colour, in a soughtafter advertising location—inside cover—and signed by “Arthur N. Edrop”. They showed a caricaturist comic drawing, against a white background, and depicted Bibendum with different characters to whom he recites a poem extolling the virtues of Michelin tires. Presumably, the text was written by Edrop himself, recalling his time as a journalist. More than a dozen advertisements exemplify that early campaign.

Another series of advertisements, from 1916 and in black and white, gives greater protagonism to technical and advertising texts. These featured a smaller Bibendum alongside tires and motorists. These were continuity campaigns, with long series of advertisements such as “9 ways to judge tires” or “Twelve tire test”, which appeared in different publications and in which the advantages and qualities of the product were listed and described consecutively.

As from 1918, colour was used as a corporative attraction with huge visual impact. Michelin’s advertising underwent a transformation, perhaps under the influence of European movements in turmoil such as the Berlin Plakatstil—poster style—and the advertisements of Lucian Bernhard or posters by Hans Rudi Erdt’s for Opel in 1911. The message had to be rapidly accessible, fat letters and outlined, flat and deep colours and a direct and central illustrative motif. The corporative yellow and blue dominated the majority of the advertisements and Bibendum acquired great protagonism. Probably the moment had come to give a voice to the seller par excellence of Michelin products. This production was the most representative and distinctive of the company’s American advertising.

Up to 1926, the advertisements in the “Edrop” style took centre stage, alternating with others produced in two colours, red and black, in which more space was devoted to more explanatory and technical text. The protagonists in these were the tire and its manufacturing characteristics. The mascot, small in size and assuming the role of teacher, emphasises the most important points of the message.
THE LAST PHASE (1927-1929)

At the end of 1926, Edrop abandoned the company’s advertising department for undisclosed reasons. This marked the end of a decade of close and continued collaboration between Michelin and Arthur N. Edrop.

During 1927 and 1928, Michelin radically changed style and procured advertisements in black and white with an extensive campaign illustrated by Gluyas Williams (1888-1982), graphic artist and cartoonist, considered as being one of the founding fathers of the American comic. Williams featured in magazines such as *Life* and *The New Yorker*, and illustrated numerous books where he depicted social life and the urban spirit of the American middle class. His illustrations for Michelin are graphic jokes in which he shows, with clean unfussy lines, a comic scene in which Bibendum advises a motorist in a tight spot.

1929 saw the last references of Michelin’s advertising presence, presaging the Great Economic Depression and the closure of the factory in Milltown. A huge enamelled garage plate and an advertisement in *The Saturday Evening Post* during this year showed the “Supertread” tire model, accompanied by Bibendum, with a graphism and use of typography far removed from the work of previous years. This was the last appearance before the closure of a large part of the business activities in the United States.

AN UNCHRISTENED MASCOT

In March, 1922, Michelin published a curious advertisement, the convening of a competition with 65 runners-up prices and a first prize of a thousand dollars in cash. The reason for the competition? To find a name for their tire mascot. In France, the Michelin Man was called Bibendum from April, 1898, when the famous character appeared for the first time in a poster designed by O’Galop, drinking a toast with a glass full of nails and bits of broken bottles. This was accompanied by the slogan “NUNC EST BIBENDUM” in Latin which translates as “now is the time to drink” which preceded the toast. Popular wisdom was quick to associate and christen the mascot with this peculiar word.

In America, on 18th January 1920, the Volstead Act or “Law of Prohibition” was declared and remained in force until 1933. This morality crusade had its precedent in different actions of the Prohibitionist Party which carried little electoral weight but was influential as a social pressure group. in 1914, the North American Congress had already received a request with six million signatures for the prohibition of liquors and wines. The new law encouraged the black market and the struggle between gangsters for control of the alcohol market.

It would thus seem obvious that a character called Bibendum, whose name encouraged drinking, was not the best letter of introduction for Michelin to the American market at that time. Thus the
intention of the competition was to rechristen the mascot. The judges’ decision was published in July 1922 and listed the winners and their suggestions. Significantly, it warned that “none of the names deserved the full approval of the judges who were of the opinion that the most suitable name was yet to be discovered”. It was perhaps an elegant way of getting out of the situation, succumbing to the legal and social pressure of the prohibitionists, however without changing Bibendum's real name.

THE ANONYMOUS ARTIST

Arthur Norman Edrop was born in Birmingham, England, in 1884. It is believed that, accompanied by some of his family, he set sail for New York from the port of Liverpool in 1896. He studied in different art schools in Brooklyn and was member of the prestigious Society of Illustrators, founded in New York in 1901, very active during the First World War. Not in vain, Its members designed illustrations and graphic material such as propaganda posters and patriotic awareness for the army's Division of Pictorial Publicity. An example are the two recruitment posters signed by Edrop which are kept in the Library of Congress.

He worked in different newspapers as a journalist –Brooklyn Eagle, New York Tribune, Philadelphia Bulletin–, writing and illustrating articles. He wrote short stories, some of which were broadcast on the radio. He also published illustrations in important magazines of that time, such as Life, Collier's, Liberty or The Saturday Evening Post and illustrated different books. As an artist and painter he was known for his oils depicting military characters and scenes, some of which were shown in the rooms of different social clubs, academies and on the walls of private collectors.

For a large part of his life he stayed in Radnor, Pennsylvania and it seems that he died near there, in Maryland, in July 1973 at the age of 89. In 1917, when 33 years old, Arthur N. Edrop started the preliminary procedure for his naturalisation as an American citizen –the Declaration of Intention document– which confirms that he was married to Edith and that both of them stayed in Brooklyn, New York. There is no evidence that he requested the definitive procedure for obtaining American citizenship i.e. the Naturalisation Document.

It was during this year that he first collaborated with Michelin. As far as the English were concerned –not forgetting that he emigrated when he was 12 years old–, he was always an American illustrator; the Americans, on the other hand, considered him as an English author. As a result, neither made reference to him in their encyclopedias.

This little known phase of Michelin's is also the story of Arthur Norman Edrop, an Englishman from Birmingham who emigrated to the United States where he designed the American advertising campaign for a French firm with premises in Milltown. An author lost in the obscurity of nationalities.
A PENDING ISSUE

However, Michelin’s American past does not end there.

In 1943, Michelin constructed a factory in Argentina, in direct competition with the Americans Firestone and Goodyear, who also set up factories in this country. Indeed, Firestone manufactured tires for US Rubber Co. –later changing to Uniroyal– in 1939, and in 1951 Pirelli entered into partnership with US Rubber Co. to manufacture and distribute in South America. Goodyear, meanwhile, manufactured tires for Dunlop.

During the 1960s, Michelin operated in the United States again, along with other European companies such as the German Continental or the Italian Pirelli. Michelin increased the importation of their technology for radial tires, frequently for supplying wheels for European cars and tires for lorries. In 1970, they obtained an advantageous agreement with Ford for equipping new cars with their tires. In 1976, they built a factory in Greenville, South Carolina, and signed a contract with another important American manufacturer, Chrysler. In this same year a factory was inaugurated in Canada. By making the most of the crisis affecting the large American companies between 1975 and 1984, they acquired Uniroyal-Goodrich Tire Company and in 1989, Kleber-Colombes. Both acquisitions allowed Michelin to position itself with renewed strength and to start a new American adventure. However this is another story.

Article first published in 2005 as a capitol in the book-catalogue

Nunc est bibendum!!.. Un mito gráfico desde 1898.

This book was the catalogue of the Michelin Exhibition running on different spanish cities between 2005-2007, under the same title.
The book, written in spanish language, contained the english and french translations.
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