

# History of Car Logos

Text taken from *CAR magazine*, July 1999. Written by Martin Buckley.

Some updates since added based on reader feedback.



## ALFA ROMEO

Are the red cross and crowned serpent devouring a human figure a warning to Alfa Sud owners who might complain about their front wings falling off? No, the symbols are the coat-of-arms of the city of Milan and related to the Crusades, hence the cross. The figure being eaten is a child or a Saracen, depending on who you listen to.



The four rings of Audi represent the four companies of the Auto-Union consortium of 1932 - DKW, Horch, Wanderer, and Audi. After the war the Audi name - which is Latin for "Hear!" - disappeared, but was revived in 1965, using the four rings as a logo.

Also, the name is sort of a pun on 'hoerch', German for 'hear', name of one of the founders.



## BMW

The BMW roundel is a stylised, rotating airscrew - the blue representing the sky. That's right - *Bayerische Motoren Werke* built military aero engines for the planes that bombed the factories that they now own. It's a funny old world.



## CITROEN

You might imagine that the forward-pointing chevron pattern symbolises Citroen's forward-looking, advanced approach to engineering. But no: Andre Citroen started in the motor trade by building gear wheels, and the twin chevrons are meant to represent gear teeth.



## FERRARI

That's not a prancing horse, it's a dancing donkey - Enzo was hung like one and he liked everyone to know. No, no - just a joke. In fact, the prancing horse was originally the emblem of Italian WWI flying ace Francesco Baracca, whose parents persuaded Ferrari to adopt the symbol of their late son for his racing Alfas.



Mr. Ford's right-hand man, Harold Wills, earned money printing business cards in his teens, so when Henry was looking for a logo in 1903 he dusted off his old John Bull printing set. The typeface was the one he used for his own visiting cards. The oval appeared in 1912, and blue was added for the Model A in 1927.



Fiat first used the five-bar logo on the Uno in 1982, after Fiat design chief Mario Maioli - driving past the Mirafiori factory at night after a power cut - saw the giant FIAT logo on top of the plant, set against the fading light of the sky.

He did a quick sketch - five bars represented the spaces he could see between the letters.



## MASERATI

Like Alfa, the Maserati badge is mere municipal pride - the trident is the traditional symbol of Bologna, where the cars were originally made.



## MAZDA

The Mazda logo is more than just a stylised tulip. Developed by Rei Yoshimara, a world-renowned corporate image-maker, the 'V' represents outstretched wings, and - in Mazda's words - 'The creativity, the sense of mission, the gentleness and flexibility that are Mazda.' Never knew there was so much in it.



## MERCEDES

Mercedes-Benz's three-pointed star represents its domination of the land, the sea, and the air. It was first seen on a Daimler in 1909, and was combined with the Benz laurel wreath in 1926 to signify the union of the two firms. The current, plain ring enclosing a star was first seen in 1937.



## MITSUBISHI

Although Mitsubishi has only been in the UK for 25 years, it built its first car in 1917. The company itself goes back to 1870, when it built its first ships - the three diamonds represent a ship's propellers.



## PEUGEOT

Pub-quiz question: what's the connection between Peugeot and the Statue of Liberty? One of the earliest Peugeot models was known as a Lion-Peugeot, which adopted the lion emblem of the city of Belfort, where it was made. Bartholdi, the sculptor responsible for the Statue of Liberty in

The name means 'three rhombs.'

New York, also takes credit for Belfort's Inn.

A reader recently commented that the logo is formed by the joining of two family emblems and does not actually represent any part of a ship. The shipping connection is a misconception brought about by their early involvement in shipping and shipbuilding.



**PORSCHE**

The Porsche badge is essentially the coat of arms of the city of Stuttgart, which was built on the site of a stud farm - hence the horse. The antlers and red-and-black stripes are part of the arms of the Kingdom of Wurttemberg.



**RENAULT**

The Renault diamond started out as a bonnet emblem. The horn lived behind it, and from 1922 the centre of the badge was cut out to allow the sound to escape. It started out circular and became a diamond shape in 1924.



Rovers are folk who rove about, rather like Vikings - hence the Viking ship emblem that has been used on Rovers in various forms since the beginning. It went very stylised and year-2000 on the original SD1s, but later models reverted to the current badge, first used on the P6.



**SKODA**

It looks like a green, flying turkey (turkeys don't fly, do they?) - which would have been appropriate for some of Skoda's earlier models - but is actually a winged arrow with no apparent significance beyond a generic impression of speediness.



**SUBARU**

Subaru was the first Japanese car company to use a name derived from its own language. It refers to a group of six stars - also known by its original Japanese name of *mutsuraboshi* - in the constellation of Taurus. We'd know them as Pleiades.



**TOYOTA**

The Japanese have a bit of a weakness for mad badges. Hence, the current Toyota symbol that *looks* like a cowboy in a big hat, but is *actually* three ellipses depicting the heart of the customer, the heart of the product, and the ever-expanding technological advancements and boundless opportunities that lie ahead. It says here.

## **VOLVO**

Volvo means 'I Roll' in Latin, and the arrowed Circle is merely the conventional map sign for steel - Sweden's most famous industry before iKEA came along.

The circle and arrow represent the shield and spear of Mars, which are also an alchemical symbol for iron. Each of the "classical" planets was associated with a metal: Sun=gold, Moon=silver, Mercury=quicksilver, Venus=copper, Mars=iron, Jupiter=tin, Saturn=lead.