CUPPLES TIRES, 
THE POWER OF THE RHINOCEROS

Elephants, hippopotamuses and rhinoceroses stand out among terrestrial mammals due to their weight and size. All three constitute the category popularly known as pachyderms. The word derives from the Greek *pachydermata*—pachys means ‘thick’ and *dermata* refers to ‘skin’—and makes direct reference to one of the qualities of these animals: the thickness of their skin. All three are powerful beings, being of great size and weight and armed with intimidating defenses in the form of large tusks or horns. In reality, the rhinoceros’s defenses are not actually horns since they do not originate from the skull as do the bony extensions of antelopes or bovine, but rather are the result of an accumulation of keratin fibers in the animal’s muzzle. The number of these ‘horns’ also helps us distinguish between the different species that exist, three in Asia and two in Africa. The rhinoceros of Sumatra and Africa—the white and black rhinoceroses—have two horns, while the rhinoceroses of Java and India possess a single horn.

The sum of size—around 4 m in length and 1.80 m in height—, weight—up to three and a half tons—, thickness of the skin—which can exceed 2 cm in certain areas of the body—, horns and the unexpected speed in this type of animal—a respectable 55 km/h—, make the rhinoceroses a reference that commercial companies and their advertising campaigns took advantage of (figs. 90-113). In the sector of the American tire industry, two cases stand out: the Cupples Company from Saint Louis, which used an Indian rhinoceros as a mascot, and the Armstrong Rubber Company, which chose an African rhinoceros as their element of identity.

1. Cupples Company and rubber
Samuel Cupples (1831-1912) belongs to that mythical group of people who became magnates because of their own entrepreneurial character. His parents were Irish emigrants who had settled in Pennsylvania, and he was the youngest of their thirteen children. The family moved to Cincinnati and Samuel, aged 15, worked at A. O. Taylor (or Tylor) Woodenware Co. as an employee selling baskets, wicker utensils and wooden poles for handles and brooms. Eventually, the company commissioned Samuel Cupples to establish and direct a delegation in Saint Louis, Missouri, an expanding city that offered new business opportunities.
Thus, in 1851, Samuel Cupples and his friend and associate Asa Americus Wallace founded the Samuel Cupples Wooden Ware Company in Saint Louis, a thriving business in charge of manufacturing, distributing and selling a wide range of tools based on the treatment of wood derivatives and other types of products. In 1871, the brothers Harry and Robert Brookings joined the company as partners and, in 1885, Samuel Cupples retired from an active professional life due to his delicate health. The entrepreneurial success turned Cupples into a millionaire and he stood out as a benefactor and philanthropist, dedicating part of his fortune to charities and endowing his city with hospitals, schools, orphanages, bookstores and other equipment linked mostly to the Methodist Church, of which he was a devoted and steadfast member. The magnate died at age 81, leaving behind his only daughter, Amelia, who inherited his entire empire.

The company continued their commercial activity detached from family control but retaining the name of their founder and maintaining headquarters in Saint Louis. In 1916, the Cupples Company began their adventure of manufacturing their first automobile tires. One year later they would produce up to 400 tires and inner tubes per day. From the beginning of the twenties, the company specialized in rubber products, both for the food packaging industry—rubber gaskets for the hermetic sealing of jars and preserves—, as well as for footwear—rubber soles for boots and shoes. In addition, they manufactured various rubber items for applications such as mechanical belts and joints, automobile industry parts and tools, and golf balls, among others (figs. 21 and 23-26).

In 1926, the Cupples Co. responded to the increased competition in the tire sector, the escalating price war and the struggle for control over independent stores they supplied. The company Rhino Tire Store, Inc. was created, which was in charge of deploying a network of contracted establishments under the name of Rhino Tire Stores. These consisted of small individual stores, managed by a single employee, decorated with the corporate colors red, white and blue and with signs that showed the company’s mascot. The press advertisements for the towns and cities where these businesses were active were created with a unified design, applying a basic structure to all promotional and identity elements (figs. 29-31).

2. The Saint Louis beast

Since their inception, the company had been using the figure of a rhinoceros as the brand image for their tire division (figs. 4-8). However, it was in 1925 when the mascot’s presence was multiplied in press advertisements and acquired a leading role. The author of the advertisement illustrations was John Joseph Eppensteiner (1893-1984), a local painter and draftsman trained at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts, specializing in landscape and zoological themes. Among the different species, Eppensteiner chose to represent an active and ferocious Indian rhinoceros, portraying it in dynamic compositions and interacting with tires (figs. 9-19).

In the year 326 BC, Alexander the Great initiated an ambitious military campaign to expand his empire to far off India. In the Indus Valley, during the Battle of Hydaspes, his troops confronted King Poros and defeated his army of elephants. It is in this setting where the West came into contact with the first real rhinoceroses. It was the Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), having a single horn—as indicated by its scientific name—and skin segmented into plates that covered the body like an armor. It is the type of rhinoceroses that the German painter and engraver Albrecht Dürer portrayed in 1515, based on a sketch and a written description of the first captured live specimen that was recorded from the time of the Roman Empire and transferred to Europe. The animal was transported from India and landed in
Lisbon as a diplomatic gift to King Manuel I of Portugal. Dürer’s engraving was widely disseminated and copied and, in spite of its obvious anatomical errors, it was consecrated as the canonical representation of the rhinoceros until the end of the 18th century.

His cultural imprint on popular imagination was so profound that, as Clarke (1986) states: “A German authority on Dürer noted as recently as 1938 that school books had only just given up the use of the Dürer woodcut as a valid image of the beast.”6 “No wonder that the colloquial name for the Indian rhinoceros in German is Panzernashorn [literally translated as armored or shielded rhinoceros].”7

It can be hypothesized that John Joseph Eppensteiner, born in Saint Louis, was the son of German immigrants—as this surname is common in that country—and that within the family educational context, he was exposed to the graphic representation of Dürer’s rhinoceros. This knowledge may have influenced his decision to choose the Indian rhino as a model for the Cupples tire advertisements. On the other hand, during the investigation of this chapter I located a postcard—without a publisher’s trademark, but most likely German—that reproduces the photograph of a male Indian rhinoceros. It was taken in 1899 at the Zoologischer Garten in Berlin, and could have been the reference model used by Eppensteiner to configure the Cupples emblem (figs. 1-3).8

In 1920, the company Cupples coined the slogan “Tough as a Rhino” [hard, resistant, tenacious as a rhinoceros] in clear allusion to the power of the animal and the impenetrability of its skin, a slogan that was used for years in press campaigns. As stated in the text of a full-page 1926 advertisement published in a U.S. magazine (fig. 16):

“The Rhino admirably interprets the mass and strength of the Cupples Diamond Jubilee Balloon. The frame of the tire is tough, twisted cord. Its muscles and hide are honest rubber. Its heart is a fighting heart. The Rhino also typifies the solidity and strength of an institution (...) The Cupples reputation for integrity is stamped with the Rhino on every Cupples Tire.”9

The Cupples rhinoceros was featured in numerous advertisements until 1929, when it was no longer utilized. It is likely that this was also the year in which the company canceled their production of tires, although they continued to manufacture other products derived from rubber. After undergoing many changes over the years, the Cupples Rubber Company is still active today as a division of the Fireside Group, dedicated to the manufacture of industrial seals, washers and belts.10

3. Armstrong Rubber Company

In the year 1912, a representative and tire salesman from New Jersey named George F. Armstrong (1879-?) decided to launch a new type of pneumatic inner tube with his own surname as a trademark and equipped with a patented valve technology called Kahn Automatic Valve. On October 6, 1915, the Armstrong Rubber Company was legally constituted in the state of New York, with an initial capital of $200,000.11 The first inner tubes were produced by an external tire manufacturer, but soon Armstrong set out to take over production. In December of 1916, the original New York company was dissolved and re-registered in the state of New Jersey with the same founding capital. The company moved their activity to the new factory in Newark and counted on James A. Walsh as superintendent.12 In the new facilities, while inner tubes were being manufactured, testing for the serial manufacture of pneumatic tires was initiated.
On April 12, 1918, the Armstrong Rubber Co. acquired a piece of land in the town of Garfield, New Jersey, in which a modern industrial building was built. The manufacture of tires began in April of the following year. By the middle of 1919, they produced 200 tires and inner tubes per day. By the beginning of the twenties production had increased to 500 tires and inner tubes, having a staff at that time composed of approximately 150 workers (figs. 32-33). Thanks to the work of Frederick Machlin, the commercial director, sales progressively increased. The company’s growth and the rise in production needs were resolved in 1922 with the acquisition of a former tire factory located in West Haven, Connecticut, where the offices were also relocated to (fig. 35). Despite the success, the company was affected by the Great Depression and George F. Armstrong decided, in 1931, to sell the business to a new company directed by his former employees Walsh and Machlin.

After the difficult times passed, Armstrong Rubber Co. became consolidated when they signed a contract with the powerful Sears, Roebuck & Co. in 1936. They were a company founded in 1893 and specialized in mail order catalog sales of products and goods for the home and automobile, with an extensive direct sales network in department stores as well as their own stores distributed throughout the country. This profitable business alliance brought financial strength to Armstrong and, in 1938, they built a modern factory in Natchez, Mississippi to adequately respond to the growing demand of supplying Sears, Roebuck & Co. Armstrong did not participate in the original car factory equipped tire market (OE). Their tire production was exclusively aimed at the replacement market (RE). In the early 1960s, the Natchez factory employed close to 1,000 people, with a daily production of 13,500 tires and 10,000 inner tubes.

At the request of the Government, during the Second World War the alliance between Armstrong and Sears, Roebuck—along with Pennsylvania, Dayton and Mansfield tire companies—joined the new Copolymer Co., dedicated to the development and manufacture of tires and derivatives of synthetic rubber. In 1949, Armstrong acquired the historic Norwalk Tire & Rubber, a company that had started manufacturing tires in 1916. By 1960, the company was ranked as fifth of all tire manufacturers in the United States, with headquarters in West Haven and with factories also located in Natchez, Mississippi; Des Moines, Iowa; Hanford, California and Norwalk, Connecticut. In 1974, a new factory was built in Nashville. In contrast, it was decided to close the West Haven production center in 1980 due to significant losses.

The decade of the 80’s marked the beginning of a recession, although the life contract with Sears, Roebuck & Co. assured them in 1981 39% of their sales. In 1981, Armstrong ranked sixth among U.S. tire manufacturers after Goodyear, Firestone, Uniroyal, Goodrich and General Tire. In 1986, the Natchez plant dedicated to the manufacture of truck tires was closed and in 1987, the companies of the Armstrong group were reorganized under the name of Armtek Corporation. They were the second largest manufacturer of agricultural machinery tires, after Goodyear. In that same year, tires accounted for approximately 35% of the company’s sales, along with diversified production of items such as hoses, belts and synthetic rubber derivatives, among others. In June 1988, the Italian Pirelli—then the fifth largest manufacturer in the world—acquired Armtek’s tire division, creating the Pirelli Armstrong Co. Pirelli had first tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain Firestone and subsequently General Tire to position themselves in the American market.

The Armstrong brand was withdrawn from the market in 1997. On April 23, 2012, Pirelli signed a contract with the company Zafco Trading LLC for the five-year transfer of the Armstrong brand—with the right to purchase after that period—, which included in the agreement their rhinoceros as a symbol and
mascot. Zafco, created in 1993, is a worldwide distributor of tires, batteries and lubricants based in Dubai but with international projection. They have more than 800 customers spread over 85 different countries as well as commercial offices in the United States, Brazil, Thailand, Russia, the United Arab Emirates and India. According to Zafco, control over the Armstrong brand is another step in their positioning strategy for the U.S. market, especially in the agricultural and commercial transport/truck segments, but without neglecting the consideration of passenger vehicles in the future.19

4. The domesticated beast

In 1951, initiating a decade of business consolidation, Armstrong’s promotional strategy opted for the figure of an animal as a symbol of their corporate identity. To advertise the new tires with Rhino-Flex technology—in which fabric strips were arranged in superimposed layers, “providing the toughness of a rhinoceros skin”—a mascot was adopted that would become famous: Tuffy Armstrong, the rhinoceros (fig. 40). The name is probably an ironic play on words of the English term ‘toughie’ [resistant and fearless] and the product the rhinoceros represents, the tough, rugged tire.

The rhinoceros was also represented in the company’s emblem, with a less caricatured graphic style and possessing a dynamic attitude, charging at the foreground with its enormous horn and jutting out from a circular border that also framed the logotype (figs. 34 and 35-39). The artist in charge of defining Tuffy was Keith Ward (1906-2000), who applied his mastery in drawing and caricature to anthropomorphize the animal and bring it to life in its publicity appearances (figs. 55-65). If the Cupples Rubber Co. mascot of the 1920s was based on India’s single-horned rhinoceros, Ward chose to portray the white rhinoceros (Ceratotherium simum), the heaviest and largest of the five species, with a huge head that supports two horns: one anterior, which could measure 120 cm in length, and one behind it, which does not exceed 60 cm. In addition, it has much smoother skin than the Indian rhinoceros, without folds and protuberances on the surface (figs. 40-41).

Between 1951 and 1954, Tuffy was featured in Armstrong’s advertisements illustrated by Keith Ward, although the character continued to be used intensively until the late 1950s (figs. 40-54 and 78-80). In 1954, Armstrong presented their Rhino-Flex tires that incorporated the new Safety Disc technology. This dealt with small rubber discs being inserted between the grooves of the tire tread design. This innovation, according to the manufacturer, allowed better tire grip on the road. To graphically represent the new technology in advertisements, it was decided to metaphorically utilize the figure of a hand that held firmly to the ground thanks to the small rubber discs positioned between its fingers. The campaign lasted until the mid–1960s, temporarily displacing the mascot as the sole protagonist for Armstrong tire advertisements (figs 66-77 and 78-80).

The figure of the rhinoceros was still present as part of the corporate emblem until 1988, in the headers of commercial stationary and appearing in certain catalogs and press advertisements (figs. 81-89). The purchase of Armstrong by the multinational Pirelli led to the removal of the mascot. The Armstrong company ceased their activity definitively in 1997. After almost a quarter of a century in reserve, thanks to the license extended by Pirelli to Zaťo Trading LLC in 2012, the animal that was in danger of extinction could recover its vitality as a symbol for the Armstrong brand. For the time being, it’s appearance was only featured in the advertisement designed to publicize the news of the agreement (fig. 97).
Notes

1. The current zoological taxonomy does not utilize the past nomenclature of “pachyderms.” This categorization was typical of an outdated conception, in which the external aspect was prioritized over internal anatomical characteristics. Going beyond the resemblance to each other, elephants are an independent group, hippopotamuses are closer to pigs and the rhinoceros is more related to horses than the previous two.

2. A full-page advertisement published on April 17, 1926 in The Saturday Evening Post stated: “Ten Years of tire building give Cupples tires all that skill can give. Seventy-five years of institutional history stand back of their integrity.” On the other hand, this date is mentioned in a note published in the journal The India Rubber World, March 1, 1916. In regards to production data, see The India Rubber World, April 1, 1917.


4. In a news item published on April 1, 1917 in The India Rubber World it’s stated: “The Cupples Co., formerly Samuel Cupples Woodenware Co., St. Louis, Missouri, is manufacturing a rubber tire with a rough safety tread of reversed and staggered C’s; also the Rhinos patented inner tube (…)”


8. Specifically, in the advertisement published in The Saturday Evening Post, June 12, 1926.


14. “Eastern and Southern notes,” The India Rubber World, July 1922, p. 695. This business success should be expounded on, as the Armstrong Rubber Co. did not appear among the 24 most important tire companies in 1920, but belonged to a large group of about 100 manufacturers that competed fiercely amongst themselves. These were apart from a dozen small companies—among them Michelin—, medium sized ones—such as Miller or Kelly-Springfield—and the big five—Goodyear, Firestone, US Rubber, BF Goodrich and Fisk. See Buenstorf and Klepper (2004).


16. “Why Armstrong Rubber still sells tires,” The New York Times, October 4, 1981. Armstrong was just one more of the American companies affected by the recession and crisis that took place
between 1979-1982, in part because of the successful radial tire technology adopted by their foreign competitors. Foreign companies such as Pirelli took advantage of this financial weakness to gain a foothold in the American market. Other examples can be seen: German Continental bought General Tire in 1981; Japanese Bridgestone acquired Firestone in 1988; and Michelin—with a factory in the United States since 1976—acquired Uniroyal Goodrich Tire Co. in 1990.


19. “The Armstrong brand is back!,” July 20, 2012; and “Modern-day phoenix: Armstrong rises from the ashes,” July 26, 2012, both published in the magazine Modern Tire Dealer. Available at the historical news archive of the original magazine in its online version: www.modernntiredealer.com

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http://cupples.slu.edu/. Much of the biographical information about Samuel Cupples can be found on the pages of the Saint Louis University website dedicated to the History of the Samuel Cupples House. The magnate’s former residence is listed as protected historical heritage.

NATURAL SOURCE OF INSPIRATION. The above postcard shows the photograph taken in 1899 portraying a male Indian rhinoceros exhibited at the Zoologischer Garten in Berlin. The images below comparing a close up of the animal’s head and the illustration made by John Joseph Eppensteiner for the corporate emblem of the American entity Cupples Company from Saint Louis reinforces the possibility that the postcard was a direct graphic reference for the artist.

1. *Rhinocéros de l’Inde*, photographic postcard with bilingual text—French and Dutch—stamped on the back, c. 1900
2-3. Close up the head of the rhinoceros extracted from the photographic postcard and Cupples’ corporate emblem in 1925.
EMBLEMATIC ANIMAL.
The image at the top of the page depicts one of the early appearances of the mascot’s entire body. The animal appears in the middle of a tire whose tread is marked with a design formed by the repetition of ‘C’ for Cupples. The company utilized a corporate identity emblem in the form of a shield in their advertisements. The chosen model is known in heraldic language as “pointed German,” because it originated from the medieval Teutonic knights; its three pointed vertices made the shield not only a defensive weapon, but also an offensive one. The face of the shield features the profile of a rhinoceros head, either as a drawing, imitating a volumetric bas-relief or as a synthetic negative silhouette with white highlighted against a black background.

A VERY TOUGH RHINOCEROS. Among the rhinoceros species, the Indian rhinoceros—with its armored folds—was chosen to represent the Cupples mascot. The dermal plates of the animal have the appearance of a protective armor. Its skin is an impenetrable defense and the adult rhinoceros has no predators. This invulnerability is the quality that Cupples tire treads metaphorically acquire.

9. Advertisement published as a Motor Age magazine insert, 1925. Art by Eppensteiner. 10. Photograph of an Indian rhinoceros, with its single horn and skin divided into plates.
AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN. Eyes wide open, mouth in a bellowing pose and body in motion present the image of a challenging, aggressive rhinoceros. This is the attitude portrayed by the Cupples mascot in the extensive 1925-1926 campaign aimed at distributors and tire dealers. Advertisements were inserted in specialized automotive sector publications announcing the sales plans for their three flagship products, Cord and Balloon tires and inner tubes. Above, the double-page advertisement states that participants attending the National Tire Dealers Convention, to be celebrated in Saint Louis in November of that year, "are invited to visit the installations of the Cupples Rubber Company and get to know the spirit of the company."

11-12. Advertisements in the magazine Motor Age, September 17 and November 12, 1925. Art by Eppensteiner.
PUT A RHINOCEROS IN YOUR LIFE. The above images portray the advertisements of the 1926 campaign, in which Cupples directly targeted consumers nationwide. Advertisements inserted in large-scale general magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post explained the proven excellence of their tires utilized in buses, passenger vehicles and cargo trucks. Reference was also made to the company’s extensive experience, being 75 years old, and the application of their experience in the rubber industry to other products such as washers, gaskets, shoe soles and golf balls. In several texts motorists are encouraged to ask directly for the Cupples brand—the brand of the rhinoceros—at the tire dealership or distributor in their city/town. In the illustrations of the advertisements, the beast is portrayed as powerful, brimming with energy and fierceness, qualities that, together with the invulnerability of its thick skin, are transmitted as metaphors of pneumatic tire qualities. It’s worth noting that the tread’s rubber studs are designed to form the initial of the company’s name, ‘C’ for Cupples.

22. CUPPLES TIRES, THE POWER OF THE RHINOCEROS

WILD ... AND FARM ANIMALS. John Joseph Eppensteiner was already, by the mid-1920s, a renowned commercial artist in his native Saint Louis. In 1894, the company Robinson-Danforth Commission was founded in Saint Louis. They were dedicated to manufacturing breakfast cereals under the Ralston brand as well as manufacturing feed for farm animals under the Purina Mills brand. The latter was subsequently named the Purina Ralston Company—graphically identified by their famous corporate border consisting of a red and white checkerboard print. They commissioned Eppensteiner to illustrate two products of their lines. His collaboration resulted in numerous illustrated advertisements between 1925 and 1932. In the Cupples tire campaigns the artist habitually signed his illustrations with his full surname; for the Purina Ralston Company, he signed them with an abbreviation: “Epp.”

17-19. Advertisement in The Saturday Evening Post, September 4, 1926, September 5, 1925 and unspecified date, 1926
RUBBER SPHERES. Numerous tire manufacturers applied their knowledge of rubber transformation to produce all kinds of rubber goods, ranging from automotive mechanical parts to footwear, clothing, medical items and golf balls. Regarding the latter, these spheres had evolved since the beginning of the sport: they went from being a ball of goose down stuffed into a smooth leather cover to become, around 1850, a solid block of rubber with a surface finish consisting of a protective layer of white paint. This new ball of compacted rubber incorporated a great aerodynamic advance, the roughness of its surface. Thus, each golf ball model was engraved with a differential and patented pattern, in addition to the manufacturer’s brand imprinted onto its surface. In 1921, Cupples introduced their Rhino balls with the generic slogan “Tough as a Rhino.” The company Pecora Paint, founded in 1862 in Philadelphia, commercialized a special elastic and resistant coating with which to repaint golf balls that had been worn-out from constant use. They employed the same animal as a mascot as well as a very similar slogan: “Tough as his hide.”

22. Advertisement for Pecora Paint Co. in a magazine from 1917.
DIFFERENT SPECIES. The catalog of products manufactured or produced under the brand “Cupples” contained numerous items. Some of them were products derived from the rubber industry, such as pneumatic tires and inner tubes or rubber heels for shoes. Others, however, were not related, such as the matches shown in the images on the right side of the page.

23-24. Price list of Cupples tires and detail of an illustration showing the packaging display of Cupples Rubber Heels, in a generic catalog for Cupples products sent by mail and dated on 15 March 1926.

25-26. Cupples match covers, possibly made in Sweden by Svenska Tändsticks Aktiebolaget (STAB), which in 1926 had already turned into the largest manufacturer of matches in the world, c. 1926.
RHINOCEROS PROTECTION. On this page, two advertisements are presented showing examples of the mascot in one of his established poses—in this case with notable variations—employed by the company to identify “Cupples” tires.

27. Advertisement published in the Syracuse Herald newspaper (Syracuse, New York), October 2, 1919.

MARKING TERRITORY.

In 1926, Cupples deployed their own network of retail establishments, the Rhino Tire Stores. The images on the left provide two examples of advertising modules utilized in local newspapers advertising offers from the stores located in that territory with a graphic design that incorporates the figure of the rhinoceros in different ways. Above right, an example of an advertising module inserted in a Salt Lake City newspaper by a local independent distributor that commercialized Cupples tires.

29. Advertisement in the San Antonio Light newspaper (San Antonio, Texas), April 1, 1927.
30. Advertisement in the Salt Lake Tribune newspaper (Salt Lake City, Utah), May 12, 1929.
Armstrong moved their activity to the town of Garfield where, in April 1919, the new factory built for tire manufacturing was launched. An important part of the production was destined to cargo vehicles, both for passengers and merchandise. On the left is an advertising photograph where Armstrong employees show a tire with the inscription “This tire has gone 18,000 miles on a Reo bus.” Flanking the workers, we see two of these buses equipped with Armstrong tires.

32. Illustration of the Armstrong Rubber Co. factory in Garfield, 1922.
33. Portrait of the employees and factory premises, c. 1920
MUTANT RHINOCEROS. In the years prior to the incorporation of the rhinoceros, the symbol of the company was a four-sided winged shield, containing the initial ‘A’ for Armstrong in the center. At the beginning of the 50s, the figure of the animal was circumscribed in a circular border that also contained the Armstrong Rhino-Flex Tires logotype and underwent slight variations throughout the decade. The last emblem used just before the takeover of Armstrong by the Italian multinational Pirelli shows, along with the logotype, the same rhinoceros free of its circular frame, in a running position with kinetic lines that reinforce the concept of movement.

34. Logotype and symbol of the company in advertisements from 1945-46.
35. The Armstrong factory in the header of corporate stationery from 1926.
36-38. Variations of the Armstrong symbol in different advertisements during the 50s. 39. Emblem of the 70s and 80s.
THE RUGGEDNESS OF WHEELS.
Under the slogan “Rugged is right” the 1951 press advertisement introduces us to Tuffy, Armstrong’s humanized African rhinoceros, disguised as a strongman from the circus. In his hands he holds two tire models, in the form of balanced weights: those destined for passenger cars and those for cargo vehicles, trucks and tractors.

41. Photograph of the profile of an African white rhinoceros, with its two horns and smooth skin. In the advertisement, the skin of the mascot is rough, with abundant folds and protuberances that exemplify the graphic convention established to represent this animal in a recognizable way. However, these traits are actually typical of the Asian rhinoceros.
22. CUPPLES TIRES, THE POWER OF THE RHINOCEROS

IN A TUXEDO, SPORTSWEAR … OR NUDE.

As a rhinoceros, one of Tuffy’s qualities is his chameleonic aspect. In the advertisements, he appears disguised as a strongman, an athlete, a law enforcer and elegantly dressed, wearing a top hat, white gloves and packed into a tuxedo. As we can see on the opposite page, in sector-specific advertising for tractor tires, he is stripped of all clothes to pull the plow with all his strength, as do Armstrong tractor tires.


The above images portray two advertisements for Armstrong’s solid rubber and pneumatic tires targeting the agricultural market. In this specific case, the illustrations were realized by Frederick Siebel “Fritz Siebel” (1913-1991), illustrator born in Vienna who emigrated to the United States in 1935 [not to be confused with the New York humorous illustrator Frederick Otto Seibel “Fred Seibel” (1886-1968)]. Siebel illustrated books, covers and magazine articles, propaganda posters and numerous advertisements for firms such as Chrysler and Ford automobiles, Shell motor oil, Textron pajamas, General Foods Sanka coffee, Barreled Sunlight Paint Company paints and Schlitz beer. Although Siebel stood out for his versatility, he often used caricatures in his illustrations.

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POLICE PROTECTION.
Tuffy being portrayed as a law enforcement agent is one of the favorite advertising images utilized. Donning a police hat and holding a Billy club, the mascot explains the technical excellence and materials used in the manufacture of Armstrong tires. A repeatedly used cross-sectional diagram of the tire breaks down the different layers that compose it, from the innermost cotton fabric double strips to the surface grip tread and its design. Just as a policeman watches over the safety of citizens on the street, the technology of Armstrong tires “Rhino-Flex” reinforces and takes care of the safety of drivers on the road.

SHOW ME YOUR IDENTIFICATION!

The image on the right depicts the rugged police officer Tuffy leaning on an Armstrong tire dispenser. A variety of promotional elements were exhibited at the point of sale and in repair shops, in which the rhinoceros was always the protagonist.

49. Tin sign, inlaid and painted, 137 x 46 cm, c. 1951.
51. Circular double-sided metal sign for lateral wall attachment, c. 1951.
52. Screen-printed canvas, 90 x 152 cm, c. 1955.
53. Painted tin plate, 122 x 48 cm, c. 1975.
MEN AND BEASTS.
Keith Ward (1906-2000) was a prominent advertising artist, illustrator of children’s books and a painter by the end of his career. He illustrated articles in many national magazines such as Collier’s, The Saturday Evening Post and Life and covers for Outdoor Life and Child Life. In his commercial works he adapted his style to the demands of the campaign and the product. His mastery of drawing allowed him to oscillate between a caricatured vision and a more realistic representation of human and animal characters. Among his commissions are the advertisements for USS Steel products, between 1945 and 1948, and for motor companies such as Texaco, Phillips Petroleum Co., Ethyl and Fram Co. oil filters.

55. Illustration of an advertisement for domestic refrigerators by Inland Manufacturing of General Motors Corp., 1960.
THE INSPIRATION FOR DISNEY. On January 25, 1961 the Texaco oil company popularized Dalmatian puppies ten years before Walt Disney released his successful animated film *101 Dalmatians*, based on the book by English writer Dodie Smith, who had emigrated to America in the 1940s. Keith Ward illustrated the antics of a litter of five Dalmatians in a campaign totaling more than forty different advertisements that, between 1950 and 1956, populated the advertising pages of leading magazines.

By 1954 and until the end of the 1970s, Armstrong, which literally means "strong arm," published press advertisements that were based on striking large-scale compositions of photographs and illustrations portraying a fist. In a smaller size and in photographs, different hands accompanied the technical explanations. It is striking that the fingers hold small rubber discs which separate them. It is the graphic way to present new Safety Discs technology, using tiny solid rubber cylindrical pieces that are embedded between the grooves of the tire tread. They total more than 1,000 pieces, as stated in the advertisements' text, which prevent the grooves from joining together and favor the tire gripping the road. The rhinoceros emblem was still present in advertisements, and small illustrations of the mascot Tuffy supported texts on the manufacturer's guarantee.

HOLDING FORCE. Another series of advertisements from the same campaign featured large illustrations of a hand emerging from the tire, an extension of its surface, gripping onto dry or wet pavement as though it were a bedsheet. The advertising text appealed to prevention and security. The slogan that headed all the advertisements was blunt: “Only Armstrong Tires can save your life.” The firm grip on the road was the result of Armstrong’s technology, which attributed maximum exertion—as seen by the tension and sweat on the hands—to the non-skid design of the tire tread: an authentic lifesaver.

22. CUPPLES TIRES, THE POWER OF THE RHINOCEROS

RUBBER FIST. In 2002, Pirelli commissioned an international advertising campaign to the Italian agency Armando Testa. The design seemed to revive the past, as it bore a certain similarity to the image of the hand used in Armstrong advertisements between 1954-1970s. It’s worth recalling that Armstrong had been acquired by Pirelli in 1988. The image chosen was that of a fist shown frontally, in which the thumb practically remains hidden and the rest of the fingers, aligned, represented the four wheels of a vehicle. The hand was dark gray in color having a rubber texture and fingers engraved with a tire tread pattern. The campaign began in 2002 with the static image of the fist. During 2005-2006 it become more dynamic, being placed in a context of extreme weather conditions—heavy rain, heat or snow. In 2007, the fist was portrayed holding the steering wheel of a car, reinforcing the idea of control.

71. Armstrong’s advertisement in Life magazine, May 9, 1955.
74. Pirelli’s 2007 campaign.
MANUAL CONTROL. Armstrong’s campaign showed the hand clenched into a fist or its fingers strongly gripping the pavement. According to journalist Priscilla Searles (2007), in the New Haven article referenced in the bibliography:

“(...) Later the company would introduce the slogan, ‘Armstrong Tires Grip the Road.’ Using a photo of a hand coming out of a tire, the company often talked sports celebrities into having their hands photographed, something the public was never aware of.”

The American sports stars who lent their images as photography or illustrated portraits included the golfer Tom Watson—winner in 1977 of the Masters and the British Open—, the football player Roger Staubach—quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys—and the tennis player Arthur Ashe—winner of three Grand Slam tournaments, one of them being the 1975 Wimbledon championship.

AN IMPRINTED RHINOCEROS.
The image below depicts a photograph of the facilities pertaining to the Elkes Pontiac Company in Tampa, Florida, representative of Pontiac cars in this city and exclusive Armstrong distributor. The figure of the rhinoceros, as a corporate symbol and as a mascot, was stamped on all types of promotional and identification support material.

78. The Elkes Pontiac Company facilities at 1101 Florida Avenue in Tampa, Florida. Photograph by Robertson & Fresh, 1953.
THE RHINO-MAGAZINE.
The images on the left show one of the covers for Armstrong’s corporate magazine *The Armstrong Tire News*, as well as advertising about the magazine on its mailing envelope.


80. Detail of the corporate envelope in which *The Armstrong Tire News* was mailed, 1953.
EXTINCTION. The years in which the rugged character of Tuffy the rhinoceros assiduously appeared in Armstrong’s promotional campaigns and in their advertising inserts faded away. During 1960-70 and the 80s the figure of the animal was only rarely utilized. The company’s logotype was featured in advertisements without him. However, in brochures and catalogs the mascot was represented graphically, accompanying the logotype, as can be seen on the catalog cover reproduced at the top of the page.

82. Catalog and price list of the different Armstrong tire models for authorized dealers, 1988.
MIGRATORY ROUTES.
This page shows two of the last appearances of the rhinoceros as Armstrong’s mascot. They consist of two advertisements published in the U.S. press before the company was acquired by the Italian multinational Pirelli. In combination with the slogan “Ride the Rhino,” the photographic representation of the animal moved on two very different surfaces—asphalted and dirt roads—to advertise the radial Five Star tire model—shown above—and the Norseman All Season model—on the left.

ON TV. Animal Makers is a California company specialized in the design and creation of static artificial or animated robotic animals that, since 1979, has worked for Hollywood movies, television and advertising producers. AMI used an animatronic replica of an African rhinoceros for the Armstrong TV spot filmed by the Lyon Studios production company in the late 1980s. The superimposed slogan of the advertisement proclaims “The evolution of the species” and the image shows us a rhinoceros protected with a raincoat under a thunder and lightning rainstorm. The message is clear: the evolved technology of the “Armstrong” tire will protect motorists and their cars in adverse weather conditions.

THE CHAMELEON RHINOCEROS. The volumetric and full-scale figure of Armstrong’s white rhinoceros, created by the company Animal Makers, was utilized both in its animated version for the television spot and in static poses for a few advertisements inserted in U.S. press. This page shows two examples from the same campaign. In the first advertisement shown above, a traffic policeman stops and tickets the rhinoceros—dressed in a suit similar to that of racecar drivers—for speeding, as a consequence of the high performance Armstrong Formula H tires. In the second advertisement, shown below, the rhinoceros is safe from inclement weather conditions—protected by a raincoat—, alluding to the protection provided by Armstrong All-Season tires.

CEMENT LANDSCAPE. In 1969, Armstrong inaugurated the building of their new headquarters built within the general plan of territorial remodeling for the city of New Haven. The project was the work of the Hungarian-born architect Marcel Breuer and his American partner Robert F. Gatje. Marcel Lajos Breuer (1902–1981) was trained at the Bauhaus in Weimar, where he received instruction from Walter Gropius and the architectural influences of Le Corbusier and Mies Van der Rohe.

The central nave of the Armstrong building—later renamed Pirelli—is preserved today thanks to the efforts of certain groups involved in the preservation of architectural legacy. At that time, these advocates opposed the planned demolition after the building had been sold to the Swedish furniture company IKEA. The rear section, elongated and flat, was sacrificed; the site is now a parking lot for store warehouse customers, after IKEA opened in 2004.


92. Photograph of the building in its present state, next to IKEA warehouses.
FOOTPRINTS FROM THE PAST. These two photographs, vestiges from the recent past—prior to 1988—remind us of the emblematic figure of Armstrong’s rhinoceros, in its most realistic version as well as in the caricatured portrait of Tuffy the mascot.

RHINOCEROS BILLBOARDS. This page presents two examples of billboards advertising Armstrong tires. Although they are from different periods, both utilized the mascot either in his more realistic and photographic version or in his illustrated version portrayed by the caricature of Tuffy.

95. Billboard for Tire Town (probably Tire Town Inc. from El Paso, Texas) advertising Armstrong agricultural tires with the rhinoceros photograph, c. 1988.
96. Billboard for the Burke-Savage Tire Corp. from Baltimore, advertising Armstrong’s Rhino-Flex tires with an illustration of Tuffy dressed as a baseball player, c. 1951.
RESURRECTION. The above image shows the advertisement designed by the company Zafco to publically announce their intention to manufacture and commercialize tires for the U.S. market, reviving the historic “Armstrong” brand and the emblematic rhinoceros.

Before Cupples and Armstrong, other companies in the tire industry had employed the figure of the rhinoceros both in Europe and in the United States. The upper image portrays an early example in the bicycle tire Hedge Thorn. This was manufactured between 1904 and 1915 by the Record Tire Company in Chicago to equip bicycles for the company Mead Cycle Co., based in the same town. The city of Chicago stood out as the hub for American bicycle production, with intense activity and numerous manufacturers of these vehicles and their components. As can be seen in both illustrations, the rubber on the flank of the tire covers was engraved with a single-horned rhinoceros and the accompanying advertising text included a phrase: “The toughness of this tire is to be compared only to the hide of a rhinoceros.”

THE protective structure of a heavy tire tread is like rhinoceros-hide—that tough yet pliable armor-skin which protects the ponderous rhino.

Resistance—protective armor against wear and tear—against scraping, chafing, heat, cold and all other enemies—is imparted to the tire at the time of its manufacture by

MICRONEX
The World’s Standard Gas Black

A dense, fluffy carbon black—the standard of the rubber industry—Micronex joins together each tiny particle of rubber—filling the weak spots, protecting the whole because of its light-resisting and wear-resisting qualities.

All standard brands of tires are Micronized in their making—Micronex adds mileage.

MICRONIZED. The above image shows the advertisement for the product Micronex manufactured by the New York-based company Binney & Smith. It dealt with carbon black, utilized by the industry as an essential component in the process of making rubber products and their vulcanization. It consisted of an additive that produced a uniform black color in the tire and increased the resistance of rubber to mechanical abrasion and friction on road surfaces during use. Once again, the metaphor of the rhinoceros’ armored skin provided an understandable explanation of a complex technological concept.

100. Advertisement inserted in the quarterly publication The Tire Rate Book, January 1927.
SUDDEN STOP. The imposing mass of a rhinoceros weighing more than three tons, moving at more than 50 km/h, seems difficult to stop. Above, in the illustration signed by Marius Rossillon “O’Galop,” Michelin’s Bibendum—represented as the typical hunter—remains undisturbed by the attack, and the horn does not appear to make a dent in him, demonstrating his imperviousness. The lower left image presents an advertisement for Turin-based solid rubber Spiga tires for trucks and buses. The mascot, a mix of a runaway hippopotamus and rhinoceros, gallops on the tire, making the world roll. The illustration is the work of the prolific French poster artist Achille Mauzan (1883-1952) who worked in Milan and Turin, lived five years in Argentina and returned to Paris in 1932. The lower right image depicts a child with a raised hand as a simple sign that manages to stop the attack. It is the young mechanic, the corporate mascot of the advertisements for the Belgian brand Englebert, dedicated to the manufacture of bicycle and automobile tires since 1898, and, from 1936, with their own French factory in the town of Clairoix-lès-Compiègne, Oise. The message of the advertisement is summarized in the two scenes presented in the composition, one—in the upper section—with characters and a humorous tone and another—below it—with the technical illustrations of a vehicle and its tire. Just as the Englebert child mascot manages to stop the powerful animal, Englebert tires respond, without problems, to the sudden braking of a car circulating at a given speed.

102. Advertisement for the solid rubber Spiga tires published in Rivista Mensile del Touring Club Italiano, January 1920.
HUMOROUS INSPIRATION. Above, a Maloja tire poster with an illustration by the Basel artist Herbert Leupin (1916-1999). Leupin humorously interprets the rhinoceros—a reference in tire advertising for its positive attributes linked to the thickness of its skin—showing how fast this heavy beast moves on Maloja tires. The Swiss company Maloja, founded in 1936, went from manufacturing bicycle tires to producing models for motorcycles and cars and modified the spelling of their name to the currently used Maloya. The image on the left presents a humorous advertisement for German Semperit truck tires, showing the caricature of a rhinoceros turned into a cargo vehicle, looking back and exclaiming: "Keep your distance!"

RUGGED TRUCKS AND REFINED OILS.
The above advertisement portrays the faces of two animals, both symbols of tenacity and toughness. With the entry of the United States into the First World War, hundreds of AC Mack trucks were shipped—manufactured by the American company Mack Trucks Inc., founded in 1900—to support the allied troops that fought in France in the transport of men, food and supplies. The resistance of these vehicles in unsuitable terrains caused the British soldiers to baptize them with the nickname of “Mack Bulldogs,” a compliment taking into account that this breed of dog was a symbol of their national identity. The name was firmly linked to the brand, so the company decided to register it legally in 1922, and the dog Mack became the official mascot of the trucks. Since 1932, a small three-dimensional bulldog has crowned the radiators of the signature vehicles.
The image on the right shows the word ‘Power’, which is the slogan for Texaco’s Havoline motor oil, one of the values associated with the rhinoceros.

PROS AND CONS. In the automotive world of motorsport there are different examples for using the figure of the rhinoceros. In 1945 the Delco-Remy batteries defined themselves, as "long-lived as an elephant," "powerful as a lion" and "rugged as a rhinoceros." In contrast, AC oil filters for engines compared the beast to the dangerous impurities of used oil, which must be trapped to avoid damage to the engine. The filters act like a trap for wild animals. The illustration of the captured Indian rhinoceros is the work of John Paul Bransom (1885-1976), an artist specialized in portraying fauna in illustrations for articles and covers of leading American magazines.

109. Vertical half-page advertisement for AC Spark Plug oil filters, a division of General Motors Corp., 1953.
ADVERTISING SAFARI. In 1936, the French subsidiary of Esso-Standard Oil launched a press campaign with different advertisements portraying powerful wild animals—wolf, panther, elephant, buffalo, polar bear—, with illustrations by Jacques Blein. The above image portrays the advertisement corresponding to the rhinoceros and its power, compared to that which can be obtained from a car engine if the proper lubricating oil is used. In this case, the source of inspiration of the illustrator is evident: on the right, the historic photograph taken in 1909 by the nature photographer Arthur Radclyffe Dugmore (1870-1955) on a four-month expedition in Africa.


GRAPHIC POWER. The above image presents the striking poster made in 1956 for the Italian advertising of Esso’s Extra gasoline by the Turin-born artist, designer and publicist Armando Testa (1917-1992). Two years before, Testa had applied his synthetic and imaginative style to create another famous image, that of Pirelli’s robust elephant —used for years with varying tire models—that exemplified the surreal fusion between animal and machine, between the natural and artificial world. In the case of Pirelli, the strength of the Atlante tire was shown by converting it into the head of the elephant. As for Esso, the power of the new fuel was incarnated by creating a half animal, half car rhinoceros. In 1957, Armando Testa founded his own advertising agency. A few years later, in 1966, he would complete his family of advertising pachyderms by creating Pippo, the endearing blue hippopotamus that served as the brand image and mascot for Lines baby diapers.
