

BRAND NAME PALINDROMES

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In 1844 a group of eleven school teachers discovered a small waterfall near Ellenville, New York and agreed to give it a name by reversing the number of their party. The Nevele Hotel, founded in 1911, now includes Nevele Falls on its property, with a plaque permanently recording the history of its name. Stories like these are, of course, extraordinary, but there exist a good many other brand names and company names which are either palindromes or are based on similar word reversals. "All things in nature are palindromes," said the now-obscure Victorian logologist Edwin Fitzpatrick, "since no variation in their shape or essence can rob them of their immanent symmetry. Language, sadly, is the sole exception of this." (For more on Fitzpatrick, the reader is referred to Howard Bergerson's Palindromes and Anagrams, published by Dover in 1973.) And when a word becomes exempt from Fitzpatrick's dictum, it is probably this very starkness and symmetry which gives it its instant memorability, the property which advertisers and other marketers are so eager to exploit as a bit of gimmickry in their sales campaigns.

Although it is by no means exhaustive, I have tried to compile a list of palindromes which have been given this kind of commercial usage -- with the hope that other Word Ways readers, especially those with a knowledge of English and other foreign businesses, can help me to expand it. I have not bothered to include a number of wholly imaginary brands such as Lonely Tylenol, Lion Rock Corn Oil, and Brand X, nor rather obvious and non-acronymic initial-based names such as A.M.A, C.C.C or S.D.S.

Aziza (cosmetic line)
Civic (car by Honda)
Dama/Amad (a perfume and men's cologne manufactured by the same firm)
Elle (magazine)
Eve (cigarette)
Ibis/Sibi (the upstairs and downstairs sections of a New York club)
Laval Deli Grocery (Brooklyn, N.Y.)
Mem Company (realty sales)
Mum (deodorant)
Nissin Foods (Lancaster, Pa.)
Noxon (silver polish)
Oyo Enterprises (an import-export firm; the name is taken from an African tribe)

Pep (cereal)
 Pizzazzip (a brand of pizza oven)
 Regal (a brand of beer; an intentional reversal of 'lager')
 Serutan (a vitamin tonic; an intentional reversal of 'nature's')
 Sinram-Marnis (a heating oil company; Sinram is a family name)
 S.O.S. (scouring pads)
 Stamats Communications (publishers of business magazines;
 Stamats is a family name)
 Tat (an insecticide)

A CATALOG OF CALLIGRAPHIC CARTWHEELS

Most students of wordplay are aware that a small set of words reproduce themselves when reflected on a vertical axis (bid, TOOT, bud), reflected on a horizontal axis (CHECKBOOK), or rotated 180 degrees (pod, suns, NOON, SWIMS). Even fewer words can be transformed into others by such transformations (dud reflects vertically to bub, and rotates to pup). In the May 1971 Word Ways, John McClellan constructed further examples by stretching the forms of certain letters a bit to resemble other letters when reflected or inverted. He concluded "the field has not been deeply explored . . . there is room for everyone . . ."

In his new book, Inversions (Byte Books, Peterborough N. H., 1981; \$8.95 paperback), Scott Kim has carried out these explorations to undreamed-of depths. By ingenious letter-distortions, he shows how a wide variety of words can be reflected on a vertical axis or rotated 180 degrees to form the same or other words: would you believe 'Inversions' can be inverted to 'Scott Kim'? His calligraphic wordplay goes well beyond McClellan's original work, including figure-and-ground exercises and tessellations (words such as 'Einstein', 'metamorphosis' or 'synergy' endlessly intersecting at right angles in a field of square tiles).

The heart of the book is 58 pages of images, each briefly explained in the text. These are strongly reminiscent of the graphic art of M. C. Escher, particularly his tilings (see Caroline H. MacGillavry's Symmetry Aspects of M. C. Escher's Periodic Drawings, 1965). Like Escher, they charm both the eye and the mind; like Escher, they challenge the viewer to work out the symmetrical constraints and interrelationships. Although, strictly speaking, Kim's book deals with letter play rather than word play, it belongs on the shelf of every logologist: buy it now!