32 Car Name Meanings - mental_floss on YouTube (Ep.203)

List Show
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Hi, I'm John Green. Welcome to my salon. This is Mental Floss on YouTube, and did you know that

1. Hyundai means "the present age" or "modernity" in Korean? But the brand's car names aren't exclusively in Korean:

2. For example, the Tiburon sports car is Spanish for "shark", and who could forget about the Hyundai Pony, which is English for "pony".

Anyway, those are the first two of many car name meanings I'm going to share with you today. By the way, I'm gonna tell you about both car brand names and car model names so you can sound like a real expert. All right, let's do this.

[Intro plays]

3. Volkswagen is German for "people's car". In the 1930s, it was actually Hitler who commissioned Ferdinand Porsche, yes, that Porsche, to build the first Volkswagen, which we now know as the Beetle.

4. Back then, it was called the "strength through joy car", but KDF was its German abbreviation. The KDF was a Nazi program, so after World War Two, the car started to be called by its nickname, the Beetle, but it is formally known as the Volkswagen Type 1. How's that for catchy? While I'm talking about Volkswagen, by the way,

5. In German, Passat means "trade wind," and

6. Jetta means "jet stream".

7. Toyota was founded by a man named Sakichi Toyoda, with a "D," not a "T". Why the later switch? Well, it's a little confusing, since we're dealing with translations here, but a representative for the company explained that the change had to do with, quote, "the number of strokes to write 'Toyota' in Japanese: eight." And that's important because eight is a lucky number in Japanese culture. Speaking of Toyota,

8. Since the Toyota Crown launched in 1955, Toyota has been using similar names for other cars, like the Corolla is named after a word for an ancient crown, and Camry comes from the Japanese word for "little crown." Wonder Woman has an idea for a Toyota: the Toyota Tiara. It's alliterative! Unrelated, but

9. Prius is Latin for "to go before," which the company chose because the car was available before, you know, like hybrids were a big deal. It's like a hipster hybrid. Side note: in 2011, Toyota invited the public to determine the plural of Prius, and voters landed on Prii.

10. Nissan came from another company, Nippon Sangyo, which translates to "Japan Industries". The first sounds of those two words were combined to give us Nissan.

11. And if you've ever wondered why Nissan's luxury line, the Infiniti, has an "I" on the end instead of a "Y", you're going to have to keep wondering, because the Infiniti website states that the name was chosen in 1987, because the four "I"s were considered a, quote, "fresh spelling."

12. Chevrolet is named after its founder, Louis Chevrolet, so let's talk about something more interesting...

13. ...the Camaro. So in the 1960s, representatives at Chevrolet claimed that Camaro was a French word for "comrade". But it's not! Now, we may never know where the name "Camaro" truly came from, but we do know that at a press conference, a reporter asked a company rep what the word meant, and the rep replied that a "Camaro" is quote, "a small vicious animal that eats Mustangs."

14. Anyway, the Corvette is a little less ambiguous, it's named after a kind of warship.

15. Mercedes-Benz is a combination of two things, the Benz patent motor wagon, and the Mercedes car. So in 1886, Karl Benz invented the first automobile, the Benz patent motor wagon. Then, in the early 1900's, a company called DMG also invented a car, the Mercedes, named after the daughter of board member Emil Jellinek. In 1926, the two parties merged into one company, Daimler-Benz, it was originally named for DMG founder Gottlieb Daimler, but quickly switched to the much catchier Mercedes-Benz. Hard out there for a Gottlieb.

16. No one knows for sure where the word "Jeep" came from, but most believe it actually came from the initials G.P. which can mean either "governmental purpose" or "general purpose." By the '40's, the word "Jeep" had come to mean any car that the military used with 4-wheel drive. The trademark for the actual brand name was acquired in the '50's.

17. By the way, Jeep is owned by Chrysler which was named after founder Walter P. Chrysler--who by the way is buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Yes, that Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, along with tons of Rockefellers and Carnegies.

You can't take it with you, my friends, but if you could, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery would be the most hopping resting place on earth.

18. The Aston Martin company had two founders: Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford. So now you know where the "Martin" came from. As for the "Aston," it's actually a reference to a place: Aston Hill in Buckinghamshire, England, where Lionel Martin used to race cars. It was these races that actually inspired Lionel and Robert to start building cars of their own in 1914 because, you know, they wanted to win the races.

Miss Piggy must be driving an Aston Martin because she's beating that Fraggle in his carrot car.

19. Another car company named after a place is Pontiac. The name actually dates back to the late 1800s when the Pontiac spring and wagon works company was doing great business in the city of Pontiac, Michigan.

Now of course, they're no longer in the wagon works business. They're also no longer in the car business.

20. In the early 1900s, August Horch was squeezed out of his own car company, called Horch. It was like an 'Eduardo from The Social Network' situation. Or the real-life guy who that happened to with actual Facebook.

Anyway, he ended up starting his own new car company. And this time, smartly, he didn't call it Horch. He called it Audi! But he still kind of named it after himself, because the name Horch is similar to the German word for "listen", so he picked a name meaning "listen" in Latin.

21. Speaking of which, Volvo means "I roll" in Latin.

22. SAAB Group is a Swedish company that develops aircrafts, but in the 1940s, they decided they wanted to get into the car business which is why we now know them best as a car brand. But weirdly enough, the name Saab actually originates from the Swedish words

for Swedish airplane company: Svenska Aeroplan AB. Which is abbreviated to SAAB.

Basically, when you buy a SAAB, you're buying a plane. A really unreliable plane. Sorry, SAAB. Did they sponsor this video? No? All right, we're good.

23. The constellation Pleiades is a cluster of stars that's also part of the Taurus constellation. In Japanese, the word for Pleiades is Subaru.

The Subaru logo of six stars is also an allusion to that constellation.

24. There are actually a few car names that are acronyms. I already told you about the Bavarian Motor Works in our acronyms episode, but did you know that the Italian company, Alfa Romeo, comes from an acronym for the Italian words for Lombard Automobile Factory Public Company and the name of its founder, Nicolo Romeo? And we have Alfa Romeo.

25. Fiat now owns that company, which is also an Italian acronym meaning Italian Automobile Factory of Turin.

26. Now of course we all know who Henry Ford is: innovator, captain of industry, vehement anti-Semite, but I'm going to finish up with a few other brands named after people.

27-30. We have founders like Soichiro Honda, David Buick, Ferruccio Lamborghini, and, of course, Enzo Ferrari.

31. And then, there are the combinations of names. Frederick Henry Royce and Charles Stewart Rolls gave us the Rolls-Royce. His name was Rolls. It was inevitable that he was going to get in the car business.

And a gentle reminder to our Japanese and/or Italian viewers: mispronouncing things is my thing.

32. And finally I return to my salon to tell you that the Cadillac is named after Detroit founder and former Louisiana governor Antoine Laumet de la Mothe, sieur de Cadillac. And, yes. I did have five years of high school French. In fact, the famous Cadillac logo is based on his family's coat of arms.

Thanks for watching Mental Floss here on YouTube, which is made with the help of all of these nice people.

Every week we endeavor to answer one of your mind blowing questions, and this weeks question comes from Richard Luciano who asks, "What is the original method and date of making popcorn anyway?". Well, Richard, popcorn goes back so far in time that it's hard to tell. Like, we know that popcorn was being eaten in ancient Peru, maybe even as early as 4700 BCE. I mean, that was before people had ceramic pots so they probably just roasted corn cobs over fire. But, on the upside, they didn't have to go to the movies and pay $17.50 for a small popcorn.

If you have a mind blowing question, please leave it in comments. We'll endevor to answer as many as we can. Thank you again for watching Mental Floss on YouTube and as we say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome.

Oh. P.S. Me from the future here. Fire, are you seriously buffering? Anyway, today's video is brought to you by audible.com, a site that allows you to download audio books of your favorite books any time you want. And, if you go to audible.com/mentalfloss now, you can get an audiobook for free including one of my books like "The Fault in Our Stars", soon to be a major motion picture, not to brag. You can find that link below and thanks again to Audible for making this video possible.