

History of the Can

The development of the can was initially for packaging food. Today the two piece beverage can is a highly efficient, technically advanced, lightweight container for carbonated soft drinks and beer.

- 1795** Napoleon offers a 12,000 franc prize for a method of preserving food for his armies which had such long, vulnerable supply lines that hunger began to tax their fighting strength.
- 1810** Nicolas Appert, a French confectioner, wins the prize. He experimented in preserving food by sterilisation.
- 1810** An Englishman, Peter Durand, received a patent from King George III for a tin-plated iron can as a food container. At that time, cans were made of iron and coated with a thin layer of tin. But even the best craftsmen could only produce up to 60 cans a day, whereas today's modern beverage can making lines are producing over one million cans a day.
- 1846** Henry Evans invents a die device for making a can in a single operation. His invention enables the production of cans to be increased from 6 to 60 per hour.
- 1847** An American, Allen Taylor, patents a machine-stamped tin can.
- 1850-70** Techniques are perfected for sealing tin cans with various types of soldering processes.
- 1877** Simplified "side seamer" for cans is introduced.
- 1880-90** Sees the first automatic can-making machinery introduced in Britain. Its development made cans a serious contender for preserving foods and liquids.
- 1885** "Condensed" milk is first canned in the United States.
- 1900** The "sanitary" open-top can is developed in Europe for food. The process greatly increases manufacturing speeds. Can lids, however, are still soldered by hand after the food has been put into the can.
- 1914** Continuous ovens for drying print on tinplate cans are introduced.
- 1920's** Developments in the improvement of the can linings are introduced to lengthen the life of the contents, using zinc compounds.
- 1922** American invention for "crimping" lids onto cans is introduced in Europe. This results in faster can manufacturing speeds.

By the 1930s the technology had advanced to a stage when drinks could be packaged in cans. Continental European producers introduced beverage cans shaped like bottles. These cans are constructed from three pieces of metal and have a cone-shaped top closed by a "crown" cork.
- 1935** The first flat-top can of beer appeared for sale in Richmond, Virginia. Canned beer is introduced to the UK by Felinfoel Brewery in Wales, using steel cans with cone-shaped tops.
- 1950's** Flat topped beer cans are introduced in Britain.
- 1963** Ernie Frazee, an American, of the Dayton Reliable Tool Company, working with Alcoa, invents the aluminium easy-open end.

This development had a dramatic effect on the growth of sales of cans as containers for beer and carbonated soft drinks, since it brought a new level of convenience to the consumer. Until that time, beverage cans relied upon a triangular steel opener to puncture holes in one end.
- 1964** The two-piece can, made from an aluminium impact extrusion, is developed in the United States. This is an important step forward, since it uses less metal than the traditional three-piece can.
- 1965** Tin-free steel cans using coatings of chromium metal and chromium oxides are

developed in the United States.

- 1966-67** The two-piece "drawn and wall ironed" (DWI) can is developed in aluminium in the United States.
- 1968** The first tin-free steel cans are made in Britain using materials supplied by the British Steel Corporation.
- 1970** Tinline two-piece DWI cans are launched in Britain followed later in the 1970s by aluminium two-piece DWI cans.
- 1981** Two-piece cans dominate the drinks can market, accounting for virtually 100% of UK beverage can production.
- 1983** Three European steel producers form tri-partite technical agreements for steel easy open end development.
- 1986** Introduction of equipment for on-line nitrogen injection allows use of beverage cans for still drinks.
- 1987** Introduction of the "206" diameter can for carbonated soft drinks.
- 1988** Introduction of the "206" diameter can for beer.
- 1989** Introduction of retained ring-pull ends for carbonated soft drinks cans.
- 1990** Introduction of retained ring-pull ends for beer cans.
- 1991** Introduction of "202" and "204" diameter cans in the USA.
- 1992** "Widget" technology introduced for draught beer in cans.
- 1993** Eco-top steel ends introduced into the UK market.
- 1994** "Widget" technology extended to lager in cans.
- 1995** Coloured tabs used for promotions.
- 1997** Introduction of coloured ends to co-ordinate with can body decoration.
- "Widget" technology extended to cider in cans.
- Introduction of shaped cans.
- 1998** Introduction of Large Opening End into the UK beer market. The aperture of these cans is 45% bigger than on a standard can. Introduction of embossed cans for take home beer.
- 1999** Undertab printing allows symbols and texts to be printed under the tab.
- 2000** Printing techniques continue to advance with the development of thermo sensitive and UV inks that react to temperature and light.
- 2002** New laser technology developed for etching numbers, designs and logos onto both sides of can ends.
- 2006** Continual improvements in the manufacture of drinks cans have enabled cans to be used for a wide variety of products, including still and sparkling wine, iced coffee and food such as nuts, fruits, and seeds.

The close co-operation of the raw material suppliers with the can manufacturers has been fundamental in all these developments. They have invested millions of pounds in research, development and new plants to cope with the requirements of can manufacturers, fillers and retailers. These developments have resulted in consumer satisfaction with, and loyalty to, drinks cans.