

THE LIST

Kit Kat turns 75



One of the most popular, and certainly one of the oldest chocolate bars in the world, the beloved Kit Kat is turning 75 this year.

Named after London's 18th-century Kit Kat Club, the earliest incarnation of the sweet was made by Rowntree following a recommendation by a factory worker for a snack "a man could take to work in his pack": it was launched in 1935 as Rowntree's Chocolate Crisp but renamed the Kit Kat Chocolate Crisp in 1937.

During World War 2 it was one of the few sweets still produced: the wrapper was changed to blue and a shortage of milk necessitated the chocolate covering go from dairy to dark, but it was viewed as an important source of energy — "What active people need!" as the ad put it.

Post-war, it was back with a bang in all its dairy-milk and red-wrapped glory; it was now, in the late 1940s, that the instantly recognisable Kit Kat marketing slogan was designed: Have a Break, Have a Kit Kat.

With the 1950s came TV advertising and increased sales and after that it was only a matter of time before the Americans wanted a piece of the brand. By the late 1960s it was being manufactured under licence by Hershey's.

When Rowntree was acquired by Nestlé in 1988, the bar was widely distributed to eastern markets, where it made new converts, especially in Japan. But the dark clouds of competition and global obesity were looming on the horizon: selling over a billion fingers a day, Kit Kat had been the bestselling choccie for decades and, for the first time, their lead was in danger.

The company responded by introducing new flavours: for the first time since the war, the Kit Kat formula was changed. In 1996 Kit Kat orange was introduced, followed by Kit Kat dark, Kit Kat caramel, and the irresistible Kit Kat chunky.

It was in Japan, though, that the hankering for variety really took off: aloe vera, soy sauce, red bean, pumpkin, apple vinegar, wasabi, and beetroot are a fraction of the choices on offer. South Africans are positively deprived with only a handful of flavours. But cheer up — according to that Bible of reliable facts, Wikipedia, we will soon be enjoying a new Pineapple Kit Kat! Hmmm — maybe I'll go for the grilled corn-flavoured bar instead. — *Aubrey Paton*