

## Tonka HISTORY

Tonka is a native word that stands for 'great.' Tonka Toys was named after Lake Minnetonka, in the state of Minnesota.



Tonka first began in 1946 as Mound Metalcraft Co., in the basement of a small schoolhouse located in Mound, Minnesota. Avery Crouse, Lynn E. Baker, and Alvin Tesch were the founders of Mound Metalcraft Co. The company was officially incorporated on September 18, 1946. Mound Metalcraft was a major producer of rakes, hoes, and shovels, as well as hat, tie, and shoe racks. Making toys started as only a sideline product. Still within their first 12 months of operation, they acquired special tooling from the L.E. Streeter Co. for a toy steam shovel. After a while, the tooling was refined, and Mound Metalcraft made their first two toys; a steam shovel and crane.

Tonka brand trucks won immediate acceptance by post-World War II families and demand far outstripped production, with the entire first year's inventory selling out in just a few months.

The Tonka brand was founded on the premise that a toy should be durable and provide the child with as much play value as possible. Over a half-century and 230 million trucks later, Tonka brand vehicles are still designed and manufactured to withstand the toughest play. Today, the Tonka brand has grown from just two truck styles into a line of more than 30 trucks, vehicles and toy play-sets. Each year the Tonka brand uses more than 119,000 pounds of yellow paint and 5.1 million pounds of sheet metal to make its trucks and vehicles

The founders attended the annual New York Toy Show in 1946, and after a successful debut there went on to manufacture 37,000 of the two metal toys; the #100 Steam Shovel and the #150 Crane and Clam. Tonka Toys enjoyed the start of what would be many years of success in the toy truck business. A resident of Mound, Minnesota named Erling W. Eklof, was called upon to develop the very first 'Tonka' logo. It only took him three days, and the logo was complete. He specifically designed the logo to represent the lake area where the manufacturing plant was located. The waves on the logo represented the waters of Lake Minnetonka. He also added three birds, and a distinctive swash type of lettering. In 1947 Mr. Eklof's logo was accepted, and stayed with the company until 1955. During that time period, the very first Tonka Toy catalog was printed in 1949.

The mission of the founders of Tonka trucks was to give America a toy that was durable, affordably priced, and fun to play with. Much time and effort was spent on designing and testing each Tonka toy. Over thirty years since its initial founding, Tonka grew from six employees at the small schoolhouse in Mound, to an elaborate manufacturing plant covering almost 1/3 mile along Lake Minnetonka;

Tonka grew to employing over 1,300 people that turned out nearly 400,000 toys each week. Their product line grew from its initial 2 toy models, to 125 toy models during that thirty-year period.

Tonka used many of the same techniques as used in the mass production of trucks and cars in Detroit, Michigan. Tonka's design process was very similar to that used by Detroit's major automakers. The evolution of a new Tonka toy always first began as a sketch, and then the visual concept tested with consumers. If a sketch was well received, and won favorable reviews, the toy was then created from clay, by model builders; the toy was given a three dimensional form.

If the clay models received a favorable reaction, they were formed into metal or fiberglass. People involved with child supervision, and early childhood development then reviewed these models. When the toy passed the inspection of this group, detailed engineering drawings and blueprints were prepared, and manufacturing specs were developed. Trial production samples were then made, and when completed, these were sent out for the toughest proving ground of all — the children!

Tonka's production and management staff would watch the reaction of children as they played with these toys. The Tonka staff then confirmed the toy's play value, and rated how well interest was retained, as well as safety and ruggedness. As long as the toy passed all of the final tests, it was mass-produced and marketed by Tonka.

Over 53 years since the initial production in 1947, Tonka has become a global operation. In 1955, Mound Metalcraft changed its name to Tonka Toys, Inc. Tonka became part of Hasbro, Inc. in 1991; today, Tonka trucks continue to be the #1 brand in the non-powered truck segment.

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