

Michele Ferrero, Nutella and Ferrero Rocher

From the sweeties.net wiki

Nutella, Kinder Surprise, Ferrero Rocher and Tic Tac all come from the same Italian family firm, and most of them from the same man, Michele Ferrero. But the story starts with his father, and with a shortage of cocoa.

Pietro and the hazelnut paste

Pietro Ferrero was a pastry maker from Piedmont, in northern Italy. After a shop in Turin failed he went back to Alba, a town known for hazelnuts, and in 1942 opened a workshop there to make sweets. In the middle of the Second World War, cocoa was hard to get, and hazelnuts, grown all around Alba, were cheap. Pietro set out to make a sweet food that was filling but cheap enough for working people.

In 1946 he launched a hazelnut paste called Pasta Gianduja, and then Giandujot, and sold a first batch of 300 kilograms. At first it was sold as a solid block. Demand grew so fast that Pietro and his wife Piera founded the Ferrero company that year, with a factory in Alba. Pietro died in March 1949, reportedly worn out by driving around Piedmont delivering his products himself, and his wife, his brother Giovanni and later his son Michele took over.

Michele and Nutella

Michele Ferrero, born in 1925, joined the firm in 1949. In 1951 it began selling a softer, spreadable version called Supercrema. In 1963 Michele and Francesco Rivella reworked the recipe, adding vegetable oil, with the aim of selling it right across Europe, and renamed it Nutella. The first jar left the Alba factory on 20 April 1964. It was an instant success, and Nutella reached the United States in 1983.

Kinder, Tic Tac and Rocher

Under Michele, the firm kept inventing. Tic Tac mints arrived in 1969, named in 1970 after the click of the box. Kinder Surprise, a chocolate egg with a toy inside, was created by Michele and William Salice and launched in 1974, based on the Italian Easter custom of giving children big chocolate eggs with a toy inside. By 2016, 30 billion had been sold.

Then, in 1979, came Ferrero Rocher: a whole roasted hazelnut in a wafer shell filled with hazelnut chocolate, covered in chocolate and chopped nuts and wrapped in gold foil. Michele, a devout Catholic who visited Lourdes every year and had a Madonna placed in every factory and office, named it after the Rocher de Massabielle, the grotto at Lourdes. He once said: "The success of Ferrero we owe to Our Lady of Lourdes."

In Britain, Rocher is still remembered for its 1990s television advert set at an ambassador's reception, with the chocolates stacked in a pyramid. It has been parodied ever since, and in 2000 it was ranked 21st in a

Channel 4 poll of the 100 greatest TV adverts. How Rocher is made is kept secret: visitors to the Alba factory may not take in phones or notebooks, and in 2015 it was making 24 million a day.

The richest man in Italy

By 2008 Michele Ferrero was the richest person in Italy, and in 2014 he was listed as the 20th richest person in the world. He died on 14 February 2015, aged 89, at his home in Monte Carlo. The company is still privately owned by the Ferrero family, now led by his son Giovanni, and has been described as one of the world's most secretive firms.

The controversies

Nutella's success has brought criticism. Its main ingredients are sugar and palm oil, which together make up more than half the jar, while hazelnuts are 13 per cent. In 2012 a French senator proposed quadrupling the tax on palm oil, a plan the media called the Nutella tax. In the same year, Ferrero paid \$3 million to settle a class action in the United States claiming its adverts misrepresented how healthy Nutella was, and dropped the health claims. In 2017 the recipe was changed to add more sugar and skimmed milk powder, and a German consumer group estimated from the lighter colour that the cocoa content had been cut.

In 2022 salmonella at a Ferrero factory in Belgium led to recalls of Kinder products across Europe: see [the Kinder salmonella recall](#). Kinder Surprise itself has long been banned in the United States because of the toy inside: see [why Kinder Surprise is banned in America](#).

Ferrero in Britain

Ferrero now owns some well known British names. It bought the chocolate maker Thorntons in 2015 for £112 million, Fox's Biscuits in 2020 for £250 million, and Burton's Biscuit Company in 2021. See [who owns the famous British sweet makers now](#).

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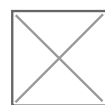
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