PG Tips Chimps: The 46 Year Campaign Story

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **The PG Tips chimps, in summary:** The PG Tips chimps ran 1956-2002 (UK longest-running TV ad campaign); real Twycross chimps voiced by Sellers and Monkhouse; ended on welfare grounds.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in March 2026.

The PG Tips chimps were one of British advertising's most famous and longest running campaigns, performing chimpanzees voicing comic sketches about tea drinking, running from 1956 to 2002. The campaign defined PG Tips' brand identity for nearly 50 years and made the brand synonymous with everyday British tea drinking culture.

The campaign history

PG Tips' chimpanzee adverts launched in 1956. The format: real performing chimps from circus and zoo backgrounds, dressed in human clothing, performing comic situations dubbed with British human voices. The chimps "drank tea," played piano, removed pianos from buildings, played football, all in service of selling PG Tips.

The campaign ran almost continuously for 46 years (1956-2002). At its peak, it was one of the most recognised advertising campaigns in UK history.

Why it worked (advertising perspective)

- Chimps' anthropomorphic appearance amplified comic effect
- British voiceover (often parodying class accents) was distinctly British humour
- Long campaign duration built brand recognition across generations
- Tea drinking centrality positioned PG Tips as "the British everyday brew"

The end of the campaign (2002)

By the 1990s, ethical concerns about using performing animals had grown. Animal welfare organisations (RSPCA, BUAV, others) increasingly objected to chimps being used for entertainment. PG Tips ended the campaign in 2002, transitioning to other advertising approaches.

The decision reflected broader cultural shifts about animal performance in entertainment. By 2002, the chimp campaign was widely viewed as outdated and ethically problematic.

Cultural legacy

The chimps remained widely remembered through the 2000s and 2010s. References in British comedy, nostalgia television, and casual conversation frequently reference "the PG Tips chimps." The campaign became an artifact of mid-20th to late-20th century British culture.

Some former chimps from the campaigns lived in retirement at sanctuaries (Twycross Zoo, for one, had several former PG Tips chimps).

Modern PG Tips advertising

Post chimps, PG Tips has used various advertising approaches:

- Monkey puppet (the "PG Tips Monkey") with celebrity voices
- Family focused everyday-brew positioning
- Direct celebrity endorsement campaigns
- Social media and digital marketing

None have matched the fame of the chimps, though the PG Tips Monkey gained its own following from 2007 to 2014.

The product itself

Despite the famous advertising, PG Tips Original is a standard mainstream UK black tea blend:

- Strong, malty, milk friendly
- CTC blend of Assam, Kenyan, and other origins
- Mass market accessible price
- ~45-50mg caffeine per cup
- Designed for milk + sugar + 4-minute brew

The cup itself is comparable to Yorkshire Tea, Tetley, and other mainstream UK black tea brands. More on PG Tips.

The "Pyramid Bag" innovation

PG Tips introduced pyramid shaped tea bags in 1996, marketed as giving leaves more room to brew. The pyramid format spread across the UK industry; many premium brands now use pyramid bags. PG Tips' pyramid innovation was a real advertising success regardless of cup quality reality (the pyramid does provide marginally more brewing space, but the difference is modest).

The ethical reflection

The PG Tips chimp campaign represents an interesting case study in advertising ethics evolution:

- 1956: chimps in entertainment broadly accepted
- 1980s-90s: increasing concerns
- 2002: campaign ended
- 2020s: similar campaigns would be unimaginable

The history reminds us how quickly cultural attitudes shift around animal welfare in entertainment.

Where to see chimp adverts

YouTube has extensive PG Tips chimp advert archives. Searches for "PG Tips chimps adverts" return decades of content. Worth viewing for cultural historical interest, even if the modern viewer experiences mixed feelings about the format.

FAQ

What were the PG Tips chimps? A long running British advertising campaign (1956-2002) using performing chimpanzees to sell PG Tips tea.

Why did the campaign end? Animal welfare concerns made performing chimp advertising culturally untenable.

Are PG Tips still using chimps? No, campaign ended in 2002.

What replaced the chimps? Various campaigns, chiefly the PG Tips Monkey puppet (2007 to 2014) with celebrity voiceovers.

Is PG Tips still sold? Yes, PG Tips Original remains a major UK black tea brand, currently owned by Lipton Teas and Infusions.

Curator's note: the PG Tips chimps are part of British cultural history, for better or worse. The campaign is a reminder that what's acceptable in advertising shifts faster than we sometimes realise. The tea itself remains exactly what it was: a strong, mainstream British black tea blend. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

What you need to know: the PG Tips chimps campaign

Element	The note
Ran	1956 to 2002 (46 years; UK longest-running TV ad campaign)
Chimps	Real performing chimps from Twycross Zoo
Voices	British comedians including Peter Sellers, Bob Monkhouse
Iconic scene	Mr Shifter the removal-man chimp ("Dad, do you know the piano is on my foot?")
Why ended	Growing animal-welfare concern; phased out by Unilever
Replaced by	Monkey + Johnny Vegas (2007 onward), then Hugh Bonneville voice
Cultural legacy	Indelible British advertising memory; ongoing nostalgia
The reflection	Much loved adverts; questionable animal welfare by modern standards

More on PG Tips

Continue with the PG Tips overview and the PG Tips deep dive.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

Where this fits in the wider range: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. There is plenty more in the tea shop, and, chimps or no chimps, UK postage is free above £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Advertising aside, PG Tips is judged on price per cup like any tea. Loose leaf usually wins, though PG's pyramid bags sometimes keep up.

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