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A brief history of the Transformers Web Exclusive

MICHAEL CHEANG traces the history of the Transformers and finds out that there is more to the toys than meets the eye.

1984

- Hasbro combines and re-brands Takara's Diaclone and Micro Change toylines into the Transformers for release in the United States, thus giving birth to the Transformers brand.
- The first Transformers introduced were the Autobot "mini-cars", including the yellow Volkswagen Beetle Bumblebee. Larger toys like Optimus Prime (probably the most recognisable Transformer of all time) and Megatron were released later.
- The first animated Transformers' TV cartoon series debuted in the United States.
- The very first ever Transformers comic book is released by Marvel Comics, eventually grew to 80 issues in total.

1985-1986

- The first team of "merge group" Transformers (smaller robots that combine to form a larger robot) – the Constructicons, were released in 1985, along with the hugely popular Dinobots (dinosaurs that change into robots) and Shockwave, the first Transformer toy to feature with electronic lights and sound.
- In 1986, Transformers: The Movie was released in cinemas and shocks fans with the death of Autobot leader Optimus Prime at the hands of Megatron. The planet-devouring Unicron also made his debut, along

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with the new Autobot and Decepticon leaders – Rodimus Prime and Galvatron.

1987 - 1990

- Several gimmicks are introduced to the toys, including the Targetmasters (humanoids that turn into the robot's weapon), and the Headmasters (vehicle pilots who become the robot's head) – a line that included the largest Transformers figure ever made – Fortress Maximus, a two-foot-tall figure that transforms into an entire city.
- The original US "Generation One" animated series is cancelled due to declining ratings, with the final season airing in 1987.
- 1990 was the last year of production for the so-called Generation One of Transformers toys.

1992-1995

- After a lapse of two years, Hasbro attempted to revive the Transformers franchise by releasing Generation II in 1992, which comprised re-releases of older figures with new paint jobs, and several new characters.
- The original animated TV show was re-released, albeit with computerised enhancements, and a new 12-issue comic book series was launched based on the Generation II brand name.

1996-1999

- In 1996, the Transformers franchise was given a new lease of life with Beast Wars, helped by a successful computer-generated animated cartoon series and a whole new concept of toys – robots that transformed into beasts instead of vehicles.
- The first mass-produced female Transformer toy – Blackarachnia (who transforms into a spider) debuted as part of the Beast Wars line.
- In 1999, Takara launched a new Transformers line: Beast Wars Neo, the Japanese take on the Beast Wars concept, with a new Japan-only cartoon and toy line. The original Beast Wars ended its run in 1999

2000-2002

- In 2000, the Beast Wars story continued into Beast Machines, which had the Maximals returning to Cybertron after winning the Beast Wars; only to end up fighting Megatron's vehicle army – the Vehicons – instead.
- Beast Machines continued in 2001 with Beast Machines: Battle for the Spark, a new line of figures complemented with a 24-episode cartoon series.
- 2002 saw the launch of Transformers: Robots in Disguise (RID), the English version of the Japanese Transformers show Car Robots, marking a return to the original vehicle-to-robot concept.
- Takara began a series of re-issues and new toys under the brand name Generation One in year 2000, featuring re-released versions of original Transformers toys. These re-issues stayed true to their original versions, using materials such as die cast metal and rubber tires. Hasbro followed suit in 2002, reissuing the Takara releases with some changes made for safety reasons, and calling it the Commemorative Series.

2003

- Transformers Armada made its debut in 2003 with a new 52-episode animated series and new toys that introduced a new race of mini Transformers – the Minicons.
- In late 2003, the first ever toy of the gigantic planet-eating Unicron (first seen in Transformers: The Movie) is released in Armada.
- Canadian-based comic company Dreamwave Productions releases a new line of Transformers comics, featuring the Generation I and Armada series, as well as The War Within – a series set on Cybertron, long before the Transformers continuity of the original cartoon series.
- Towards the end of the Armada line, Hasbro released an alternate line – Transformer Universe, which consisted of repaints and retools of past Transformers toys, ranging from G2 to Armada.

- Takara and Hasbro collaborated to create the Binaltech/Alternators line, a line targeted at adult collectors, featuring real-life cars. The first of these was Smokescreen, who transformed into a Subaru Impreza WRC rally-racing car.

2004

- The Transformers brand celebrates its 20th anniversary with a new line of toys and a new cartoon series – Transformers Energon, which picks up where Armada left off.
- The 20th Anniversary Optimus Prime (known as Masterpiece Convoy in Japan) toy is released to commemorate the anniversary. Basically a 12-inch version of the Autobot leader, it was hailed as the best version of the character ever made, featuring unprecedented articulation, special features and superior materials.
- The next line of Transformers after Energon is announced. Called Transformers Cybertron, it is due to make its debut next year.

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