



# Product Transformers

# Placement:

## Transformers- Product Placement

	<p>A Transformer is seen at the premiere of the Paramount film “Transformers” at Mann’s Village Theater in California in June 2007. The Hollywood tradition of product placement will soar to a new level when the Steven Spielberg-produced action film “Transformers” is unleashed on US cinema-goers this week. (AFP/Getty Images/File/Grazer Harrison)</p>	
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Associated Press

## GM Hopes Film Will Transform Sales



By MIKE HO— USEHOLDER 07.02.07

<http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2007/07/02/ap3878074.html>

Posters outside theaters across the country list Jon Voight,

Shia LaBeouf, Josh Duhamel and Megan Fox as the stars of the summer action flick "Transformers."

But in the labs and cubicles where **General Motors Corp.** workers design and market new cars, the true leads are the Chevrolet Camaro, Pontiac Solstice, GMC TopKick and Hummer H2.

"You're going to see these cars as the heroes. You're not going to see the other actors," said Dino Bernacchi, GM's associate director of branded entertainment. "These cars are the stars, literally, in the movie."

GM, which long has sought to reach younger car buyers to so-so results, is hoping to draw the 18-to-34 set to its showrooms thanks to the company's oversized presence in the film and in the accompanying toys and video games.

The Detroit auto giant is spending millions to promote and market its "Transformers" tie-ins, but wouldn't give a figure. With a shrinking U.S. automotive market and amid stiff competition from overseas rivals, GM is banking on the exposure translating into sales.

"This is hopefully a discovery point for maybe some of those who didn't know the great design, the great-looking vehicles that we have out today," Bernacchi said. "I find it really difficult to believe that a global blockbuster movie like this that has so many merchandising components to it that we're not going to get incremental exposure."

And exposure is exactly what GM gets in the film.

The word "Camaro" is mentioned a handful of times by various characters, and close-ups of the Chevy, Pontiac, GMC and Hummer logos get ample screen time.

"Product placement has never been so blatant, and the potential for a global platform to build brand awareness could not have come at a better time for GM," said David Koehler, a

clinical marketing professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

“The younger demographic most likely to flock to the theaters is exactly what GM needs,” he said.

But Erich Merkle, vice president of forecasting for Grand Rapids-based auto consulting company IRN Inc., cautions that even though young people might be impressed with the rides in the movie doesn't mean they'll end up buying GM.

“Keep in mind that some of the vehicles they're showing are vehicles the youth market won't be able to afford,” he said.

“But they do have a tremendous influence over what people who can afford those vehicles go to buy. You shouldn't underestimate the influence of the youth. I don't know a Baby Boomer out there who doesn't want to be cool.”

Those who shell out to see “Transformers” probably aren't all that concerned about free-falling market shares or upcoming union negotiations. They want action, and that's what they're going to get from these GM vehicles.

Through the magic of filmmaking, they transform into “Autobots” – heroic aliens that take mechanical forms on Earth. The Autobots, which strive for a peaceful coexistence with humans, battle the evil Decepticons, whose goal is to dominate the universe.

The DreamWorks/Paramount film, which opens this week, is based on **Hasbro**'s “robots in disguise” toys and the cartoon series, both of which were popular among children in the 1980s.

For the film's producers and director Michael Bay, it was a natural to bring in GM on the project.

Bay has helmed a number of GM commercials and worked with the company on past films, including “Bad Boys II” in which a Hummer plays a central role in a car chase.

“It’s a company that understands Hollywood’s work process, and you need that,” said Lorenzo di Bonaventura, who served as a producer on the movie.

“In many ways, we couldn’t have made this movie without a company like GM,” he said.

Bay’s relationship with the automaker – both as a filmmaker and as a consumer – goes back many years, and he is longtime fan of the Camaro, the legendary Detroit muscle car that first hit the road four decades ago.

The director of “Armageddon” and “Pearl Harbor” saw a concept version of the new Camaro in 2005 at a GM design center and then in early 2006 at the Detroit auto show. Bay knew he wanted the iconic car to be the yellow-and-black Bumblebee, a courageous Autobot spy who protects LaBeouf’s character from danger.

Bumblebee transformed into a Volkswagen Beetle during the series’ 1980s heyday, but Bay was set on the concept Camaro.

GM staged a review of its product portfolio in California so the director could pick out the remainder of the movie’s automotive cast.

He selected the Solstice to be the stylish and wisecracking Jazz, which was a Porsche in the 1980s. Rounding out the Autobot lineup are the tough-as-nails Ironhide (the TopKick medium-duty truck) and the medical officer Ratchet, which converts from the Hummer H2.

The Autobot leader, Optimus Prime, is an 18-wheeler.

The Decepticons change into a jet, a helicopter and a police car – a Saleen Mustang, an aftermarket version of the famed Ford muscle car and a longtime Camaro competitor. **Ford Motor Co.** did not have any involvement in the vehicle’s appearance in the film.

The Solstice, TopKick and Hummer can be seen driving down a local thoroughfare on any given day, but the Camaro won't be produced until late next year. Each of the three existing vehicles was slightly modified for the movie, but the Camaro took the most effort.

Its exterior in the film is very similar to what the production vehicle will look like, but "the interior isn't quite cosmetically correct," Bernacchi said. The movie Camaro's chassis and engine actually belong to a Pontiac GTO built in Australia. GM designers provided the studio with the data so it could drop the Camaro shell on top of the chassis it was using for the film.

In "Transformers," Bumblebee takes the shape of a well-traveled 1970s-era Camaro, prompting Fox's character to ask: "Why if he's such a super advanced robot does he turn into this piece of crap Camaro?"

Not long after, Bumblebee upgrades to the concept Camaro, an event that di Bonaventura said has been met with spontaneous audience applause at a number of screenings, including at a film festival in Italy.

GM is hoping car buyers have a similar reaction.

"I really think it's going to make a difference," Bernacchi said.

### **Hollywood's upcoming 'Transformers': car ads in disguise**

by Tangi Quemener *Sun Jul 1, 11:54 AM ET*

The Hollywood tradition of product placement will soar to a new level when the Steven Spielberg-produced action film "Transformers" is unleashed on US cinema-goers this week.

Based on the successful line of toys launched during the 1980s which spawned a popular cartoon series and several comic books, the new movie version of "Transformers" has become one of the most talked about films

in years.

But while film buffs marvel at the spectacular computer-generated pyrotechnics, US automaker General Motors (GM) is hoping that big box-office will translate into big car sales.

Four GM models have prominent roles in the film, which sees them "transform" from cars into robot warriors battling to save planet Earth from destruction against evil rival robots.

The GM vehicles, which unsurprisingly feature in the film as the good guys on the side of mankind, have featured prominently pre-release publicity for the film, which lands in US cinemas on Monday.

Dino Bernacchi, associate director of marketing alliances and branded entertainment at GM, said "Transformers" represents a rare convergence of big-business and Hollywood.

"We try to find properties where the cars are the stars, and literally our cars are the stars of this movie," Bernacchi told The Hollywood Reporter. "You don't get any more heroic than the roles that our four vehicles play."

The car-robot given pride of place in the film, a Chevrolet Camaro, went out of production in 2002 but is set to be re-launched in 2008.

Alongside the Camaro is a gas-guzzling Hummer H2, a super-sized GMC Topkick pick-up truck and a low-cost Pontiac Solstice convertible.

"I think this is a once-in-a-motion-picture-history-type opportunity for an automotive company where you have a film that actually incorporates multiple cars that are actually characters in the film," LeeAnne Stables, senior vice-president of worldwide marketing partnerships at Paramount studios, told the Hollywood Reporter.

According to movie industry press reports, GM did not pay for the right to feature in "Transformers," but instead has helped offset the huge promotional costs of the film by featuring the movie in ad campaigns for its cars.

In exchange, "Transformers" director Michael Bay ("Armageddon," "The Rock" and "Bad Boys") has directed five separated commercials for GM.

Park Choong-Whan, a professor of marketing at the University of Southern California, described GM's "Transformers" tie-in as "probably the most aggressive form of product placement strategy."

"This alliance can become a truly innovative and effective formable promotion," Park said. "If and when the main characters in the 'Transformers' movies are truly meaningful, and surprising, and emotional then I think this type of promotion can still produce very strong effects."

But Park warned that the campaign could backfire.

"People may discount the true effect that may be possible from this tie-in because they already know about it," he said.

"There's is a kind of boomerang effect ... If prior attitudes of the people towards General Motors are negative, then it may not have strong impact at all."