

**History behind the  
'Tastic' range.**

An excerpt from "Innovation  
and Enterprise.

A history of Backwell IXL  
1858–2008."



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## History behind the 'Tastic' range

**In the 1970s Australian bathrooms were rarely heated. Those that were, generally relied on a wall-mounted strip heater. The same situation applied to ventilation, where eight-inch ceiling fans were sometimes used.**

The Backwell's interest in this area of domestic heating was kindled initially by John's brother-in-law who had rigged up an infrared lamp in his bathroom as a means of generating warmth in this normally cold room. While this heater had no exhaust fan, and bore little resemblance to the future 'Tastic' products, it triggered an idea in the minds of John and Brian. They went separately to the USA and found that infrared lamps were being used as bathroom heaters. Armed with this market research, they decided to produce a bathroom appliance that combined heating with fan ventilation. John Backwell and Brian Bishop did the design and development work. This new appliance had four infrared globes in front of an eight-inch ceiling fan. The development cost was some \$25,000. The first working model was installed and tested in John's home, 33 years ago. On 6 July 1977 the design for the 'Tastic' appliance was granted under the Designs Act (No.72245).

The 'Tastic' appliance was produced the same year. Initially the design used standard frosted bulbs; however it was found that by altering the focus and using clear glass the performance of the bulbs could be improved significantly.

In 1980 John Backwell developed the 'Vent-a-light', based on the 'Tastic' body. It was designed specifically for use in toilets. The unit was fitted with a timer that activated a light and fan in the ceiling. Soon after its launch it became obvious that the market considered the unit to be too expensive at \$100 and so sales were limited.

From the start annual sales of the 'Tastic' appliance were slow but steady, reaching 15,000 units in 1985. The market for 'Tastic' came largely from regional cities because these were the traditional market places for IXL products. John was cautious about undertaking a more aggressive marketing programme because he was concerned that the Backwell IXL distribution systems could not cope with a sudden influx of orders for the 'Tastic' product. This subsequently proved not to be the case.



*Historical Advertising Material*

## History behind the 'Tastic' range

As is the experience with successful products, they are copied by rivals. The first copy, 'Pure Heat', closely followed the design of the IXL 'Tastic', but added the feature of a single central light globe, which allowed the 'Pure Heat' unit to have a separate lighting function. The Backwell designers quickly responded to this challenge by including a central globe into the IXL unit. At the same time they cut costs and improved the appearance of the fascia. With improved marketing, including a national television advertising campaign in 1986, sales of the new look IXL 'Tastic' took off.

While, in general, there was little competition in the early 1990s, Zaps of Brisbane became a challenge, particularly when Gerrard Industries took over its distribution. When Kambrook introduced a two-light globe unit, the directors again responded with IXL 'Companion', and in 1995 the IXL 'Triumph', which, among other features, had a plastic body. In 1991, a new body structure was created for the IXL models 'Nouvelle', 'Delux', 'Silhouette' and 'Sensation'. This proliferation of models was the directors' way of raising the height of entry barriers for would-be competitors.

Sourcing of components, such as globes, was a critical consideration in the production of the 'Tastic' range of products. For instance Japanese and Hungarian globes were superior in durability, focus and water resistance to Korean makes.

The IXL 'Tastic' range has been a mainstay of the company's business since 1985 and a major contributor to the company's profitability over the period.

This success was reflected in the company being named the overall winner of the Geelong Business magazine's 'Geelong Business Excellence Award' for 1987.



*The Original Tastic back then...*



*The Original Tastic today*

## History behind the 'Tastic' range

The 'Tastic' product is an example of the high-tech innovation for which Backwell IXL has become noted. For instance, the airflow generated by the IXL 'Tastic' is significantly greater than that generated by its competitors. This is due to the aerodynamic flow characteristics designed into the fan and housing.

In 1998 the IXL 'Easy Duct Tastic' was launched onto the world market. The company developed the new 'Tastic' model in response to the trend in building codes in parts of Australia, the USA and the United Kingdom that required exhaust fumes to be ducted out of the house by a blower fan. The company's initial plan was to position a blower on the side of an existing 'Tastic' body, but this was found to be difficult. After an expenditure of some hundreds of thousands of dollars the company produced a fully tooled plastic bodied ducted IXL 'Tastic'. This new product received an international award from Montell Australia for good design with plastics.

One of the important features of the 'Tastic' product is its quality. In general, the quality standards employed by Ford and Toyota have been used by the company's contract pressings division in the manufacture of the 'Tastic' range.

In addition, the product line's comprehensive test rig has been responsible for reducing service calls and customer complaints to virtually zero. This system was designed by Ross McDonald, Backwell's Business Development and Engineering Manager; Ron Maher, Backwell's Maintenance Engineer; and the company's contract electrician, Glen Sharrock of Gordon McKay Pty. Ltd. In essence, the rig accounts for and tests each component, even down to checking that the fan is installed the right way up and that it works.



*The Triumph Tastic back then...*



*The Triumph Tastic today*

