

# 10 Hand Tool Brands That Don't Get The Love They Deserve

By **Travis Raynes**





Marketing has taken over the world. Over the years companies have found a way to squeeze advertising lives. In the United States alone there is something like \$120 Billion dollars spent each year just on TV a staggering number, one that it's hard to believe exists outside the National Debt, and at this point you're around just how much that really is. Let me help you out. Of the 186 Countries who's GDP's (Gross Domestic Monetary Fund tracks, that's more than 121 of them and more than the bottom 40 COMBINED! At \$4,00 alone probably boast close to \$100 million in ads by itself. Needless to say, marketing is big business. Co every year to cure all or most of the worlds problems, but instead they spend it just to get you to notice the Evening News and American Idol....crazy isn't it?

These companies (or the agencies they hire) are good at what they do. The key to effectiveness is getting are apt to buy the product. It's the reason you see Mac Tools logos at car races, bail bondsman signs across and the reason Army recruiters hang out at high schools.



*Then theres publicity you just can't buy.*

But despite today's trend of high dollar ads and awkward celebrity endorsements, there are some companies products to sell, just don't spend a Rockefeller sized fortune to tell you about them. There are a number because they aren't relying on the customer base these type of ads generate, sometimes it's because they do it, and sometimes it's undoubtedly because their products speak for themselves.

That's why today's focus is on some of those oft forgotten companies that exist solely on their reputation shares, the companies who's products sell themselves, regardless of who's hands they are pictured in, th



Clipper Company by George B. DeArment, it is still owned by the DeArment family to this day. I know who Channellock is". True, but this article isn't about companies you've never heard of. In today's drive the market, house brands are pushed beyond others, and fancy new multi-purpose pliers gain all the glory about a true to their roots company like Channellock. Through the years Channellock pliers have maintained quality, American made, pliers. They aren't flashy chrome, and they don't have self adjusting capabilities they work hard and last forever. I have 20 different pairs of them and wish I had more. Check them out |

## 7. Proto



I routinely profess my unconditional love for Proto. I can't help it. I got my first Proto ratchet from my dad when I was a kid. It's a long handled, 1/2", J5450 I call "Big Bad John". For my entire adult life it has gotten all the jobs and ratchets cowering with fear, and it's never failed. If you can't bust a fastener with a 5450, you'd better hit

The other day my wife's grandfather, who retired as a mechanic in the late 80's, came into my garage for a job. He picked up one of my numerous Proto ratchets and commented that Proto made great tools, but you just don't know how old it was and when I told him I bought it new last year, he looked at me like I was crazy. Being 80 years old, he really doesn't keep up on things, but his reaction isn't all that uncommon from people who don't know Proto is still King. For the majority of the 20th century Proto (Known as Plomb until 1948) was a widely known brand in the shops of America, but in 1970 they turned their focus almost entirely on the industrial market and never

Today's Proto is still the high quality stuff it always was, but they just don't market themselves to consumers like Stanley/B&D since 1984, Proto is their top shelf industrial line opposite the Mac line of premium mechanics (and marketing \$'s go). They are predominantly USA made and import items are very few and far between. In many cases they are near or completely identical to a Mac item in all but color, for half the price. You can view their lineup [HERE](#)

## 6. Armstrong



Armstrong is another old brand that's still thriving. Founded in Chicago in 1890 as Armstrong Bros. Tool Company, it has a long history as Danaher's industrial line opposite their Matco mechanics tool division. Armstrong was rolled into

Matco was retained as sole property of Danaher, but the 2 lines still share many traits. As with Proto/Mac offers predominately USA made quality on par with the tool trucks in many cases, at a significantly more known for their very unique looking ratchets which are excellent quality, but when you mention Armstrong people have forgotten they exist.



I'd love to see some Armstrong reviews here at TIA, but in the mean time you'll have to check them out

#### 5. Martin Tools

*Martin Tools*

When's the last time you were on a tool forum or talking shop in your buddy's garage and someone recommended Martin? Founded in 1951 and based in Arlington, TX, Martin is a family owned, multi-national, manufacturer who also manufactures Sprockets, Pulley/Conveyer parts, material handling, and power transmission products. I've used their tools prior to this article, but all the Martin tools I've ever used were nice quality and USA made. Check them out

#### 4. Blackhawk

**Blackhawk**  
"PROTO"

If you read my article about Blackhawk a couple weeks back (If not you can read it [HERE](#)) then you know where I'm coming from. Blackhawk has a rich history and their mid-century stuff is some of the most sought after collector's items. Of being a mainstay in the auto part stores of the country may be gone, Blackhawk is still around and still they exist as Proto's "budget" industrial line and offer many American made tools. Pretty much anything Blackhawk is Taiwan sourced, but regardless of Country of Origin, it's all good stuff. I've said it at least 100 times and sockets and combo wrenches are the best value in their respective categories, bar none. You can get a 1/2" Blackhawk combos, with ASD open ends like their Proto cousins at Zoro Tools right now for under \$120 somewhere for a new set. I've recommended them I couldn't tell you how many times, and at least half a dozen communications from people who are tickled to death with what they got for the price.

#### 3. Wright Tools



## WRIGHT TOOL

Founded in 1927, Barberton, OH based Wright Tool is a privately owned company that focuses on the ind high quality tools on par with other high end industrial brands, but unlike most of the other industrial bra big boys, Wright is a smaller, stand alone company. In 2010 Wright introduced their now popular WrightC benefits of Snap-On's FlankDrive+ design, for a fraction of the price. They produce 100% American made that's something worth supporting. Wright is another company I'd love to see here at TIA, but for now yo [HERE](#)

## 2. Wilde Tool



*Wild-ee...Quality Tools Since 1922*

It wouldn't surprise me in the least if you've never heard of Wilde Tool at all. Founded in 1922, Hiawatha manufacturer of high quality, American made, tools. While their name may not ring a bell, if you, your fa bought tools from Sears, Montgomery Ward's, JC Penny's, or even Western Auto, theres a real good char your hands. You see, Wilde has been the OEM for many house brand products over the years, in fact, it's Known primarily for their quality pliers, chisels, and pry bars, Wilde offers a wide range of items. They se well as rebranded items made by others, but all are USA made quality. Affordable too. Their [online catalog](#)

## 1. Lang Tools



The most unloved, yet deserving of love, company on our list is Lang Tools. Founded in 1932, Racine, WI under it's 4th generation of family ownership. They owe a little of their obscure nature to themselves tho brands, a lot of branding for a small company to handle. The best known of these was Kastar, while the c of them. Last year they wised up and consolidated all 4 brands under the Lang banner which I feel will h Like Wilde, even if you've never heard of them, you've used their tools. Remember those old school ratcl had before the ratcheting combos came out? Lang invented them, and while they seem a little antiquate time. Lang also manufacturers virtually every thread restorer or "chaser" made in America. Whether you \$65, or the [48 piece set from Mac for \\$125](#), or the [48 piece set from Snap-On for \\$129](#), they all came fr

they're all made by Lang. Don't send me any strongly worded messages about how the Snap-On version undisclosed location near the earth's core by holocaust surviving leprechauns and christened in unicorn t Winfield) "we both know that shit ain't the truth". Check out Lang's catalog [HERE](#).

---

---

### Travis Raynes

Travis (Conductor562 on the Forums) is an Editor and Forum Administrator for Tools In Action. As a fat broken. He enjoys woodworking and restorations. While he enjoys all tools, he focuses primarily on hand tools. He can be found in his home shop working on something with lots of help from his 5 year apprentice Evan (aka

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM [@TOOLSINACTION](#)

