

Admiral Byrd's Snowmen

It's a long way from Philadelphia to Antarctica – about 25,000 miles. Pep Boys made the trip in the winter of 1933-1934 by outfitting Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd's second Antarctic expedition with two Kellett K2 Autogiros. These were small and nimble aircraft that Byrd's team used for short trips in the Antarctic. The Autogiros were sent ahead by ship to Australia, the starting point of the expedition.

Byrd was deeply grateful to Pep Boys, which donated the aircraft partly for promotion but mainly as a patriotic effort to support one of America's greatest explorers. (The expedition was privately funded by a number of corporate and charitable donations.) "The Autogiros will be of considerable value in landing on small areas and on rough surfaces of the ice," Byrd told Manny, Moe, and a cheering crowd of more than 3,500 fans at the presentation ceremony at Camden, NJ Air Field on September 22, 1933. Lester Rosenfeld, then a young boy, calls the day "one of my most vivid memories."

Pep Boys' gift to Byrd also included tools and a huge supply of private-label Snowman antifreeze. Naturally, each autogiro was nicknamed The Pep Boys Snowman.

They sported the figures of Manny, Moe, and Jack, clad in fur coats, pants, and mukluks, plus the Snowman logo.

That winter, Americans were thrilled to follow Byrd's exploits via live broadcasts from his base camp – a first in radio history. Throughout Pep Boys territory on the East Coast, motorists saw Snowman ads on 550 billboards, in newspapers and magazines, and in store window displays. Philadelphia radio station WCAU (now WPHT) touted Snowman as "the antifreeze sensation of 1934."

Giving Byrd two autogiros proved smart, because one crashed in heavy winds near the South Pole. The second one was eventually shipped back to Philadelphia, where the Franklin Institute used it in lecture tours. Ever alert to promotional opportunities, Moe hired one of Byrd's pilots to use the craft to fly advertising banners for the stores at New Jersey beaches on summer weekends.

The surviving Pep Boys Snowman met a patriotic end. During World War II, its fuselage was cut into one-inch squares and given to war bond buyers.

Pep Boys executives proudly gathered on September 22, 1933, to present Rear Admiral Richard A. Byrd with Autogiros for his second Antarctic expedition. Moe is the tall man in the back row. Manny and Byrd are second and third from the left in the front row.



The Pep Boys: A Company History

The Pep Boys founders Manny, Moe, and Jack were American advertising icons. In creating the company's first-ever history book, we had thousands of MM&J cartoons to choose from. But we also wanted to showcase them as real people making real decisions.

This image of Manny and Moe with Admiral Richard Byrd proved ideal. The company outfitted Byrd with an aircraft and Pep Boys antifreeze for his second Antarctic expedition. Moreover, this support came during the Great Depression, when Byrd's expedition (broadcast live from base camp on national radio) gave Americans a reason for hope and pride.

Innovative marketers and loyal patriots, not merely cartoon characters — this is a strand of The Pep Boys' corporate DNA we were delighted to uncover and share.



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