

# The Oscar

“Oscar”? That’s always seems such an odd name for this award. Of course, there’s a story behind it, but still...

The Academy Awards, commonly known as The Oscars, is an annual American awards ceremony honoring cinematic achievements in the film industry. Winners are awarded the statuette, officially the Academy Award of Merit, that is much better known by its nickname “Oscar”. The awards, first presented in 1929 at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, are overseen by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The Oscar Academy Awards are an electoral race to the trophy to best film in any category.

Although there are seven other types of annual awards presented by the Academy, plus two awards that are not presented annually, the best known one is the Oscar statuette. Made of gold-plated britannium on a black metal base, it is 13.5 in. tall, weighs 8.5 lb and depicts a knight rendered in Art Deco style holding a crusader's sword standing on a reel of film with five spokes. The five spokes represent the original branches of the Academy: Actors, Writers, Directors, Producers, and Technicians.

In 1928, MGM's art director Cedric Gibbons, one of the original Academy members, supervised the design of the award trophy by printing the design on a scroll. In need of a model for his statuette, Gibbons was introduced by his future wife Dolores del Río to Mexican film director and actor Emilio "El Indio" Fernández. Reluctant at first, Fernández was finally convinced to pose nude to create what today is known as the "Oscar". Then, sculptor George Stanley (who also did the Muse Fountain at the Hollywood Bowl) sculpted Gibbons's design in clay and Sachin Smith cast the statuette in 92.5 percent tin and 7.5 percent copper and then gold-plated it. The only addition to the Oscar since it was created is a minor streamlining of the base. The original Oscar mold was cast in 1928 at the C.W. Shumway & Sons Foundry in Batavia, Illinois, which also contributed to casting the molds for the Vince Lombardi Trophy and Emmy Awards statuettes. Since 1983, approximately 50 Oscars are made each year in Chicago by Illinois manufacturer R.S. Owens & Company. The awards weigh 8.5 pounds each and take between three to four weeks to manufacture each statue.

In support of the American effort in World War II, the statuettes were made of plaster and were traded in for gold ones after the war had ended.

The origin of the name “Oscar” is disputed. One biography of Bette Davis claims that she named the Oscar after her first husband, band leader Harmon Oscar Nelson; one of the earliest mentions in print of the term Oscar dates back to a *Time* magazine article about the 1934 6th Academy Awards. Walt Disney is also quoted as thanking the Academy for his Oscar as early as 1932. Another claimed origin is that the Academy's Executive Secretary, Margaret Herrick, first saw the award in 1931 and made reference to the statuette's reminding her of her "Uncle Oscar" (a nickname for her cousin Oscar Pierce). Columnist Sidney Skolsky was present during Herrick's naming and seized the name in his byline, "Employees have affectionately dubbed their famous statuette 'Oscar'". The trophy was officially dubbed the "Oscar" in 1939 by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. [Wikipedia]

