



Official Statement Regarding Sale Of Third Party Products

As the 2012 convention season draws tantalisingly near, Transformers forums on both sides of the pond are alive with discussion about one particular issue. “Third Party Products”, as they have come to be known, are the proverbial hot potato of the year, and we at Auto Assembly have decided to tackle the issue head on.

Unless you’ve been living under a large, AFA graded Rocklord for the past couple of years, you will be all too familiar with “Third Party Products” – an umbrella term adopted by Transformers fans to describe a plethora of toys, accessories and merchandise which, to varying degrees, draw inspiration from everybody’s favourite Robots In Disguise, whilst at the same time, being in no way endorsed by Hasbro, or Takara/Tomy.

There lays the dilemma faced by collectors. Does it bother you that your new green and purple gestalt, as beautiful as it is, does not come in a Hasbro package? Do you feel as if your collection of official products is being cheapened by imposters of varying quality? Or are you indifferent? Do you just need that new Prime-like-figure, no matter the cost?

At Auto Assembly, we have one strong and clear belief – that those questions should be answered by individual collectors, **not** by convention organisers.

We believe a blanket ban on Third Party Products would be inappropriate and could lead to a bland and stagnant dealers rooms, filled with no more varied stock than could be found on an average high street; therefore we have taken the decision to adopt a much more open position as have many of our other fan convention friends including Savcon, Dairycon, and Slagacon. Of course, there will still be some Third Party Products which will remain prohibited and we believe fans will support us in our view that certain items should not be allowed at the convention on grounds of safety or illegality. For this reason, we have spent considerable time making a new Third Party Products Policy, so all of our dealers will be clear as to what can and cannot be sold at Auto Assembly and our attendees will know in advance what to expect to find at the convention.

Another important factor which has aided our decision, is the excellent relationship we have with our dealers. For many years, they have provided the backbone of Auto Assembly, travelling the length and breadth of the country and from further afield to support us at our events, through good times and bad. We value our dealers massively and we simply do not feel it would be right to impose draconian sanctions on the stock they are allowed to bring to the convention. This is one of the main reasons behind us looking at this issue since Auto Assembly 2011 and making this announcing five months before the convention takes place, because we want our dealers to have the time to consider their stock carefully. This is, after all, their livelihood, and we feel strongly that we should support them, just as they have supported us.

There is however, another important relationship which we have taken into consideration. Auto Assembly is incredibly lucky to hold such a good rapport with Hasbro UK. It is a longstanding dialect which has stretched for several years now. Hasbro have attended our events, provided us with exclusive prizes for our competitions and are in plans for Auto Assembly 2012 and beyond. We are both appreciative and proud of this relationship and we want to make sure that this continues.

It will therefore come as no surprise that this special relationship has played a key role in our approach to the Third Party Product issue with which we are faced. Simply put, without Hasbro, there would be no Transformers. Therefore, even though we are not an official convention and thus, not compelled to act in accordance with rules imposed at other events, we have independently decided to offer our support to Hasbro in the face of the rise of Third Party Products.

We have also worked closely with a wide range of other Transformers license holders over the years and feel that our relationship with these has allowed us to enhance the convention in ways that have benefited fans every year. Whether this has been from our work with IDW in producing incentive Auto Assembly comic covers, working with Activision and Jagex to source competition prizes and exclusive video game previews, or Titan Books who have generously supplied us with thousands of pounds worth of comics for our attendees.

In light of all of the above partnerships, we have therefore decided to place some guidelines on what is allowed. Because as far as we are concerned, if a product is proven to infringe upon Hasbro's Intellectual Property rights, then we do not want to see it at our show. Theft of IP is still theft and Auto Assembly does not condone that under any circumstances.

Therefore, until ongoing legal action is resolved, all dealers are prohibited from selling "igear" merchandise at Auto Assembly. We have no connection with "igear" and certainly mean them no discourtesy, but we have chosen to reserve our support of their merchandise until such time as the legal position surrounding the same is clear. We believe we will have the full backing of our attendees in taking this decision, which we shall of course revisit once clarity has been brought about.

Likewise, there are certain other products which will be prohibited at our shows. The list includes, but is not limited to;

- all igear products
- all KO Toys products
- all products from Impossible Toys
- unofficial versions of "world's smallest" Transformers eg. WST Dinobots and similar toys produced by Justitoys
- unofficial replica Transformers (ie – direct or slightly tweaked copies which purport to be originals)
- unofficial duplicates of Transformers or Knock-offs of existing toys, either reproduced at their original, reduced or over-sized
- unofficial replica Transformers boxes (which can be used to trick attendees)

Essentially, if a product purports to be an original Hasbro or Takara/Tomy product, or is reverse engineered from one either in mould or in colour, then we consider these items to be prohibited.

Other Third Party Products, which use completely newly devised moulds, are presently allowed as at the time of writing we do not believe these products to violate existing IP rights. We do of course reserve the right to alter our stance should Hasbro or Takara/Tomy initiate legal action against any particular manufacturers, because as stated, we wish to show our support to the organisations which own the Transformers brand. Until this happens however, we have no reason to believe that there is any inherent illegality involved in the marketing of these products and as such their sale at Auto Assembly 2012 will be allowed.

Each of our existing dealers will be sent a pack in the next few days which will outline our views clearly on this matter; and we are open to continued dialect with our dealers to ensure clarity on

what will and won't be allowed as we wish to ensure that they are fully supported through these times. However, in light of recent news, we felt it was important to make our stance known to the public at large in order that our attendees could be made aware that developments at other events will not adversely affect our convention.

In summary; third party products **will** be available for sale at Auto Assembly 2012, with some exceptions and some guidelines being put in place to ensure a safe and enjoyable convention for everybody.

Thank you for taking the time to read this statement. We look forward to meeting you all at Auto Assembly 2012.

Til all are one.

The Auto Assembly Committee

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