

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #281

The Story of Red Bull

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[00:00:00] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about Red Bull.

[00:00:27] It is the most famous energy drink in the world, and its [origin¹](#) is...unlikely.

[00:00:32] In this episode we'll meet a toothpaste salesman, Thai boxers, bull [semen²](#), trips to space, Formula 1, American [lawsuits³](#), and nightclubs.

[00:00:44] It is an amazing story, so I hope you'll enjoy it.

¹ beginning

² the male reproductive fluid, sperm

³ cases brought to a court of law

The Story of Red Bull

[00:00:49] OK then, The Story of Red Bull.

[00:00:52] I should start this episode with just a little [disclaimer⁴](#), and that is that this episode is in no way [sponsored⁵](#) by or [affiliated⁶](#) with Red Bull.

[00:01:03] In fact, I hate the taste of Red Bull, but I do like the story.

[00:01:08] And our story, the story of Red Bull, starts in 1987, with a 43-year-old Austrian toothpaste salesman.

[00:01:19] His name was Dietrich Mateschitz, and in 1987 he travelled to Thailand on business.

[00:01:26] He was the marketing director of a German toothpaste brand called Blendax and he was meeting with a Thai businessman who wanted to make a deal to arrange the import of this German toothpaste.

[00:01:40] Mateschitz was experiencing [jet lag⁷](#), he was feeling tired from his flight and the time difference, so he drank a bottle of a local energy drink.

⁴ a statement that denies something

⁵ provided with funding, paid for advertising reasons

⁶ connected with or controlled by

⁷ a feeling of fatigue or tiredness caused by his flight and the time difference

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[00:01:52] This super sweet drink was called Krating Daeng, and it had a **logo**⁸ of two red bulls facing each other.

[00:02:01] Sound familiar?

[00:02:02] The man felt a **boost**⁹ of energy, his **jet lag** was cured, but more importantly, he had an idea.

[00:02:10] But before he could spend much time thinking about this idea, he had a meeting to get to.

[00:02:16] The meeting was with a man called Chaleo Yoovidhya, who just happened to be the inventor of that super sweet energy drink Mateschitz had drunk earlier.

[00:02:27] Mateschitz was **intrigued**¹⁰.

[00:02:29] He was suddenly more interested in this drink than selling toothpaste, which was the reason he was in Thailand in the first place.

[00:02:37] A **tad**¹¹ **ironic**¹², a bit funny, perhaps? Going somewhere for toothpaste, but staying for a sugary, sweet drink.

⁸ design or symbol used by the product's company to advertise it

⁹ increase

¹⁰ very interested

¹¹ a little

¹² strange and funny because of being very different from what one would expect

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[00:02:45] Before we proceed with what our Austrian toothpaste salesman, Mateschitz, did next, we need to know a bit more about the man he was meeting, Chaleo Yoovidhya.

[00:02:56] He was 21 years older than Mateschitz, and had had a very different childhood and [upbringing](#)¹³.

[00:03:03] He barely had any formal education, he rarely went to school and started working when he was a very young man, practically still a boy.

[00:03:13] At first, he worked with his parents.

[00:03:16] Very soon, he moved to Bangkok and started selling medicinal products, he was an [antibiotics](#)¹⁴ salesman to begin with.

[00:03:25] After proving his sales ability, he started his own company, TC Pharmaceuticals, in the early 1960s.

[00:03:34] The year of his life that is [crucial](#)¹⁵, or most important for our story, however, will be 1976.

¹³ the way he was raised up

¹⁴ medicine that can destroy dangerous bacteria in the body

¹⁵ most important

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[00:03:42] That was when he placed a new drink on the market, after having, what he himself has said was “a [stroke](#)¹⁶ of divine inspiration”, that is, he suddenly felt inspired, as if some invisible source helped him.

[00:03:58] Yoovidhya created a drink that consisted of water, sugar, [taurine](#)¹⁷, caffeine, vitamin B and [inositol](#)¹⁸, which is another type of sugar.

[00:04:10] It was initially sold in pharmacies, and it [boasted](#)¹⁹ a picture of two red bulls fighting with horns.

[00:04:19] It was called Krating Daeng, which literally means ”red bull”, like the image on the logo.

[00:04:26] A little [trivia](#)²⁰, a little fun fact is that the animal on the logo is not actually a bull, it’s something called a gaur, which is a bull-like animal also known as an Indian [bison](#)²¹.

[00:04:39] This animal is the symbol for Thailand, it is the fifth largest land animal in the world and interestingly enough, it is not famous for fighting.

¹⁶ sudden hit or occurrence

¹⁷ a chemical substance found in plants and animals that are joined together to make proteins

¹⁸ a type of sugar

¹⁹ showed or displayed in a prideful way

²⁰ a little fun fact

²¹ a large wild animal similar to a cow

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[00:04:49] Gaurs have no natural enemies, because they're so big, and when it comes to the **mating**²² season, the biggest male gets the female of his choice - they don't fight like deer, or other animals.

[00:05:03] Anyway, let's get back to our Thai drink.

[00:05:07] When it first launched, it mainly targeted the working class in Thailand, factory workers and drivers who were having to work increasingly long hours.

[00:05:18] This new drink, Krating Daeng, was affordable, it was cheap, and it would give them a quick energy **boost**.

[00:05:27] While you might have thought it was an immediate hit, it actually wasn't.

[00:05:33] As will become a theme throughout the history of Red Bull, it needed some **cunning**²³ marketing to get people **hooked on**²⁴ the drink.

[00:05:43] This **hook**²⁵, this reason to drink Red Bull, came from an unlikely source.

[00:05:49] Muay Thai, or Thai Boxing.

²² relating to animals coming together to breed or reproduce

²³ clever and involving tricks

²⁴ strongly attracted to

²⁵ reason, attraction

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[00:05:52] It was only when Krating Daeng started to [sponsor](#)²⁶ Muay Thai boxing rings, and to get the fighters to drink it, that the drink's popularity started to grow.

[00:06:03] As more and more people saw it and tried it for the first time, they became aware of its [restorative](#)²⁷ properties, of the fact that it does give you a bit of an energy [boost](#).

[00:06:15] It became popular with truck drivers, who realised that it helped them drive longer and with more focus.

[00:06:23] Soon after, the popularity of this Thai Red Bull [skyrocketed](#)²⁸, it became very famous and successful, and that is when Dietrich Mateschitz enters our story.

[00:06:35] Chaleo Yoovidhya, thanks to his invention, was now a rich man, and his company had started doing international business, which is why he thought of importing this German toothpaste.

[00:06:49] He was a pharmacist [by trade](#)²⁹, so it does sort of make sense.

²⁶ support financially in return for advertising

²⁷ having the ability to give you a bit of an energy increase

²⁸ increased very quickly

²⁹ professionally, it was his job

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[00:06:54] When the Austrian toothpaste salesman Mateschitz met Yoovidhya, supposedly to talk about exporting toothpaste to Thailand, the conversation quickly turned to bringing another product back to Europe.

[00:07:07] Krating Daeng.

[00:07:08] But Mateschitz knew that some changes would be necessary to make it [appeal to](#)³⁰ European tastes.

[00:07:15] The drink Mateschitz had drunk was like a very sweet [cough syrup](#)³¹, cough medicine.

[00:07:22] Mateschitz decided to make the drink [fizzy](#)³²—the original Thai version was not—and to make it taste more like other Western [carbonated](#)³³ drinks, Coca Cola, Sprite, Fanta, and those sorts of things.

[00:07:38] The pair formed a partnership, with each investing half a million dollars.

[00:07:44] Each would get a 49% share in the company, with the remaining 2% going to Yoovidhya's son.

³⁰ attract or please

³¹ cough liquid medicine

³² having bubbles, sparkling

³³ containing bubbles of carbon dioxide

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[00:07:52] The name of the European drink would be a direct translation of Krating Daeng. Its name would be, of course, Red Bull.

[00:08:01] The first product was launched on April 1st 1987.

[00:08:05] But there was a lot of work to do to make Europeans start [guzzling down](#)³⁴ Red Bull.

[00:08:12] Energy drinks [were not a thing](#)³⁵ in Europe back then, they were not a popular choice of beverage, and there was no market for the product.

[00:08:21] But Mateschitz, being an advertising expert, realised that he had to create a market for the product, he knew that he needed to make people believe that they needed Red Bull in their life.

[00:08:35] He [teamed up](#)³⁶ with Rauch, a famous can packaging company, and together they created this tall, blue and silver can with [distinctive](#)³⁷ red bulls that would become the [signature](#)³⁸ style for Red Bull all over the world.

³⁴ drinking very quickly with excitement

³⁵ were not popular

³⁶ joined with it to work together

³⁷ easy to recognise because of being different from other things

³⁸ very characteristic style by which it can be identified

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[00:08:50] In Europe, unlike in its home market of Thailand, Red Bull would be a premium drink, more expensive than other soft drinks, something for people to [aspire to](#)³⁹.

[00:09:02] But turning Red Bull into an [aspirational](#)⁴⁰ brand and product would require some creativity, some [thinking out of the box](#)⁴¹.

[00:09:13] For Red Bull, this came in the form of [associating](#)⁴² Red Bull with intense activity - fast cars, extreme sports, and nightclubs.

[00:09:24] The drink might have been positioned in Thailand as a way for truck drivers to keep driving or workers to stay awake, but in Europe it was a way for extreme sports [junkies](#)⁴³ to get a [rush](#)⁴⁴ or for clubbers to stay awake dancing into the night.

[00:09:42] Recently, Red Bull even entered the world of gaming, [targeting](#)⁴⁵ video gamers as their new consumer group.

³⁹ want very much (something of value)

⁴⁰ making you want it very much because of its value

⁴¹ thinking in a way that would be new or different and show imagination

⁴² connecting in people's minds

⁴³ very dedicated or enthusiastic followers

⁴⁴ sudden intense feeling

⁴⁵ choosing to aim their attention at

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[00:09:50] And Red Bull has, for many people, become more famous for its marketing [stunts](#)⁴⁶ and tactics than the energy drink, even breaking world records in the process.

[00:10:02] You may remember the name Felix Baumgartner.

[00:10:06] He is an Austrian [daredevil](#)⁴⁷, an extreme sports professional, and on October 14th of 2012, as part of Red Bull's Stratos project, he jumped out of a balloon from the edge of space, 39km above the Earth's surface, and travelled at up to 1,357 km per hour before returning safely to Earth.

[00:10:31] This [stunt](#)⁴⁸, this sending Baumgartner to space, cost Red Bull an estimated \$65 million to do, but it created huge [exposure](#)⁴⁹ for the brand, with some experts suggesting that the value gained from it could be worth up to \$6 billion.

[00:10:51] So Red Bull obviously thought it was worth it.

[00:10:54] And this is the exact strategy of Red Bull, how it has turned a simple energy drink into a global phenomenon.

[00:11:03] It sponsors all manner of extreme and dangerous sports, from Formula One to BMX cycling, cliff jumping, flying, skiing, and skateboarding.

⁴⁶ unusual things or events done to attract attention

⁴⁷ a person who does dangerous things

⁴⁸ unusual event done to attract attention

⁴⁹ publicity, advertising

The Story of Red Bull

[00:11:15] Through the years, Red Bull as a company has expanded into several areas and today it owns six football teams, two esports teams, two Formula One teams, a NASCAR team and an ice-hockey team.

[00:11:29] It also owns a travel agency, a clothing brand, a career-finding website, a television channel, a record label, and a sponsorship business which supports a [whooping⁵⁰](#) ninety different sports.

[00:11:42] Oh, and of course, it also owns the drink, which is still the major source of revenue for the company.

[00:11:49] But, what does Red Bull actually make?

[00:11:52] The answer is simple: Nothing, really.

[00:11:55] There are no Red Bull drink-making factories, or clothes-making factories, or music-making studios.

[00:12:02] The Red Bull drinks are made by partner factories.

[00:12:07] Red Bull the company is essentially a marketing, sponsorship and media company with one [overriding⁵¹](#) objective: to strengthen the Red Bull brand.

[00:12:18] And it is now a very strong brand indeed, with estimates valuing it at around \$15 billion.

⁵⁰ impressive

⁵¹ more important than any other

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[00:12:26] The [slogan](#)⁵² of Red Bull is one you may well know.

[00:12:30] Unlike some companies, which change their [slogans](#)⁵³ depending on cultural differences, the Red Bull [slogan](#) is the same everywhere: “it gives you wings”.

[00:12:40] [Figurative](#)⁵⁴ wings, of course, it’s not [claiming](#)⁵⁵ that you’ll get real wings, but it might surprise you to find out that this [slogan](#), this [claim](#)⁵⁶ that it would “give you wings” did actually get Red Bull in trouble, and it led to a [lawsuit](#)⁵⁷.

[00:12:56] An American citizen and Red Bull drinker, a man called Benjamin Careathers, [sued](#)⁵⁸ the company back in 2013 for dishonesty, for not being honest with the [claim](#) that it would “give you wings”.

[00:13:10] Now, he didn’t sue Red Bull because he didn’t actually grow wings, that would be ridiculous, but his [claim](#) was that Red Bull drinks didn’t give as much energy as they [claimed](#)⁵⁹ they did.

⁵² a short easily remembered phrase which advertises the product

⁵³ short easily remembered phrases which advertise their product

⁵⁴ imaginary, not real

⁵⁵ saying

⁵⁶ statement, saying

⁵⁷ case brought to a court of law

⁵⁸ took legal action against

⁵⁹ said that it was true

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[00:13:23] He won the case because his lawyers proved that a can of the drink has less caffeine than an average cup of coffee, so it was [misleading⁶⁰](#) to [claim](#) it gives you so much energy.

[00:13:35] What did he get out of it, you might be thinking?

[00:13:37] Millions of dollars in [compensation⁶¹](#)? A lifetime supply of Red Bull? A private tour of the Red Bull offices? To go on the next skydive with Felix Baumgartner?

[00:13:47] Nope, he got \$10 in [compensation](#).

[00:13:51] But the interesting fact about this [lawsuit](#) is that the judge ruled that every person who had bought a can of Red Bull in America in the twelve years prior to, before the case, could fill in a form and could also [claim⁶²](#) the same \$10 in [compensation](#) from Red Bull.

[00:14:10] There were fears that this would lead to Red Bull having to pay out almost thirteen million dollars in [compensation](#) payments, but very few people actually [took up⁶³](#) this offer, and the deadline has now expired

[00:14:24] And of course, the [slogan](#) hasn't changed.

⁶⁰ giving the wrong idea or impression

⁶¹ an award in recognition that he was right

⁶² formally request or demand

⁶³ accepted, used

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[00:14:27] But this wouldn't be the last of Red Bull's difficulties, and in fact there have been plenty of [claims](#)⁶⁴ over the years that Red Bull gives you too much energy, that it is a dangerous drink.

[00:14:40] In 2000, a student called Ross Cooney died during a basketball match after drinking three cans of Red Bull, and this [triggered](#)⁶⁵ fear and [outrage](#)⁶⁶, with several countries, including France, banning the sale of the original Red Bull.

[00:14:57] I should say that there have been many experiments and investigations that Red Bull is safe to drink in normal amounts, but—like almost anything—if you drink litres of it and especially if you [combine](#)⁶⁷ it with lots of alcohol, well, it can be problematic.

[00:15:15] One other interesting and unfortunate difficulty that Red Bull got itself into was related to bull [semen](#), the male reproductive fluid.

[00:15:26] One of the ingredients in Red Bull was something called [taurine](#).

[00:15:31] There were claims that this [taurine](#) ingredient was taken from bull [semen](#), which would obviously be quite [disturbing](#)⁶⁸ if it were true, but—just in case you have heard this [claim](#) and weren't sure whether it was true—it's not.

⁶⁴ statements that it is true

⁶⁵ caused

⁶⁶ a feeling of anger and shock

⁶⁷ mix, join together

⁶⁸ worrying, upsetting

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[00:15:47] **Taurine** is something that exists in practically every animal, including humans, and the taurine used in drinks like Red Bull is **synthesised**⁶⁹, it is made **synthetically**⁷⁰, with absolutely no bull **semen** being used.

[00:16:02] For all of its legal difficulties and problems getting people to believe it is safe to drink, Red Bull has turned into a multi-billion dollar brand, with an estimated 10 billion cans of the stuff sold every year.

[00:16:18] It owns Formula One Teams, sends people to space, has its own planes, runs music festivals, holds skydiving championships and even has its own TV channel.

[00:16:30] And **lest we forget**⁷¹, it also controls the most successful energy drink in the world.

[00:16:36] And to think, it all came from a tired Austrian toothpaste salesman trying to get over his **jet lag**.

[00:16:45] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Red Bull.

⁶⁹ made by using artificial, not natural materials

⁷⁰ by using artificial, not natural materials

⁷¹ it shouldn't be forgotten that

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[00:16:49] Whether you are an [avid⁷²](#) Red Bull drinker, or you [can't stand⁷³](#) the smell of the stuff, well I hope it was a fun one and you learned something new.

[00:16:58] As always, I would love to know your thoughts about this episode. Are you a big Red Bull fan?

[00:17:04] What is Red Bull [associated⁷⁴](#) with in your country?

[00:17:07] Have you tried Krating Daeng, the original Thai version?

[00:17:10] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:17:14] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com, and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:17:23] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:17:28] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

⁷² showing extreme interest or enthusiasm

⁷³ don't like it at all

⁷⁴ connected in people's minds

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Origin	beginning
Semen	the male reproductive fluid, sperm
Lawsuits	cases brought to a court of law
Disclaimer	a statement that denies something
Sponsored	provided with funding, paid for advertising reasons
Affiliated	connected with or controlled by
Jet lag	a feeling of fatigue or tiredness caused by his flight and the time difference
Logo	design or symbol used by the product's company to advertise it
Boost	increase
Intrigued	very interested
Tad	a little
Ironic	strange and funny because of being very different from what one

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would expect

Upbringing

the way he was raised up

Antibiotics

medicine that can destroy dangerous bacteria in the body

Crucial

most important

Stroke

sudden hit or occurrence

Taurine

a chemical substance found in plants and animals that are joined together to make proteins

Inositol

a type of sugar

Boasted

showed or displayed in a prideful way

Trivia

a little fun fact

Bison

a large wild animal similar to a cow

Mating

relating to animals coming together to breed or reproduce

Cunning

clever and involving tricks

Hooked on

strongly attracted to

Hook

reason, attraction

Sponsor

support financially in return for advertising

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Restorative	having the ability to give you a bit of an energy increase
Skyrocketed	increased very quickly
By trade	professionally, it was his job
Appeal to	attract or please
Cough syrup	cough liquid medicine
Fizzy	having bubbles, sparkling
Carbonated	containing bubbles of carbon dioxide
Guzzling down	drinking very quickly with excitement
Were not a thing	were not popular
Teamed up	joined with it to work together
Distinctive	easy to recognise because of being different from other things
Signature	very characteristic style by which it can be identified
Aspire to	want very much (something of value)
Aspirational	making you want it very much because of its value
Thinking out of the box	thinking in a way that would be new or different and show imagination

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Associating	connecting in people's minds
Junkies	very dedicated or enthusiastic followers
Rush	sudden intense feeling
Targeting	choosing to aim their attention at
Stunts	unusual things or events done to attract attention
Daredevil	a person who does dangerous things
Stunt	unusual event done to attract attention
Exposure	publicity, advertising
Whooping	impressive
Overriding	more important than any other
Slogan	a short easily remembered phrase which advertises the product
Slogans	short easily remembered phrases which advertise their product
Figurative	imaginary, not real
Claiming	saying
Claim	statement, saying

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Lawsuit	case brought to a court of law
Sued	took legal action against
Claimed	said that it was true
Misleading	giving the wrong idea or impression
Compensation	an award in recognition that he was right
Claim	formally request or demand
Took up	accepted, used
Claims	statements that it is true
Triggered	caused
Outrage	a feeling of anger and shock
Combine	mix, join together
Disturbing	worrying, upsetting
Synthesised	made by using artificial, not natural materials
Synthetically	by using artificial, not natural materials
Lest we forget	it shouldn't be forgotten that

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Avid showing extreme interest or enthusiasm

Can't stand don't like it at all

Associated connected in people's minds

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com