

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION

Compagnie Generale des Etablissements Michelin v. Phil Howard, Kithcen 47
Case No. D2025-3315

1. The Parties

The Complainant is Compagnie Generale des Etablissements Michelin, France, represented by Tmark Conseils, France.

The Respondent is Phil Howard, Kithcen 47, United Kingdom.

2. The Domain Names and Registrar

The disputed domain names <guidemichelinsstar.com>, <guidemichelinsstar.net>, <guidemichelinstar.com>, <guidemichelinstar.net>, <guidemichelinstars.com>, <guidemichelinstars.net> are registered with Gname.com Pte. Ltd. (the "Registrar").

3. Procedural History

The Complaint was filed with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the "Center") on August 18, 2025. On August 19, 2025, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain names. On August 20, 2025, the Registrar transmitted by email to the Center its verification response disclosing registrant and contact information for the disputed domain names which differed from the named Respondent (Redacted for Privacy) and contact information in the Complaint. The Center sent an email communication to the Complainant on August 20, 2025, providing the registrant and contact information disclosed by the Registrar, and inviting the Complainant to submit an amendment to the Complaint. The Complainant filed an amended Complaint on August 21, 2025.

The Center verified that the Complaint together with the amended Complaint satisfied the formal requirements of the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the "Policy" or "UDRP"), the Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the "Rules"), and the WIPO Supplemental Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the "Supplemental Rules").

In accordance with the Rules, paragraphs 2 and 4, the Center formally notified the Respondent of the Complaint, and the proceedings commenced on August 25, 2025. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5, the due date for Response was September 14, 2025. The Respondent did not submit any response. Accordingly, the Center notified the Respondent's default on September 16, 2025.

The Center appointed Andrew Brown K.C. as the sole panelist in this matter on September 19, 2025. The Panel finds that it was properly constituted. The Panel has submitted the Statement of Acceptance and Declaration of Impartiality and Independence, as required by the Center to ensure compliance with the Rules, paragraph 7.

4. Factual Background

The Complainant is a French public limited company registered in France since July 1, 1955, with earlier antecedent businesses.

The Complainant owns trademark registrations for MICHELIN in many countries around the world related to tires production and sales as well as road maps and various guide publications in the field of restaurants.

In particular the Complainant holds the following trademark registrations (the “MICHELIN Trademark”):

Mark	Number	Jurisdiction	Date of Registration
MICHELIN	1254506	International	December 10, 2014
MICHELIN	5775734	United States of America	June 11, 2019
MICHELIN	013558366	European Union	April 17, 2015

Each of these trademarks covers products and services related to tourism, hospitality, restaurant and gastronomy, and in particular “multimedia publications in electronic form available online from databases in the field of travel, tourism and gastronomy or for services of editing and publication of guides”.

The Complainant has used and provided its MICHELIN Trademark for more than a century. The Complainant and its predecessor businesses began publishing a travel gastronomy guide in Europe in 1900. The Michelin Star is a rating system that has been used by the Complainant since 1926 to grade restaurants or their quality. The three-star system was introduced in 1931.

The disputed domain names were registered on July 21, 2025. The disputed domain names have a common landing page located there. This page displays the Complainant’s MICHELIN Trademark and a reproduction of its official mascot, or “Michelin man”. The webpage has a background image showing plates depicting fine dining and features a login/sign up tab.

5. Parties’ Contentions

A. Complainant

The Complainant contends that it has satisfied each of the elements required under the Policy for a transfer of the disputed domain names.

Notably, the Complainant contends that it has trademark rights in the MICHELIN Trademark in respect of tire production and sales as well as road maps and various guide publications in the field of restaurants. It further claims that it has registered and used various domain names incorporating its MICHELIN Trademark including <michelin.com>, registered on December 1, 1993. It states that all these rights were well-known trademarks and domain names and pre-dated the registration of the disputed domain names on July 22, 2025.

The Complainant contends that the disputed domain names identically reproduce its well-known MICHELIN mark and that the disputed domain names are each confusingly similar to its MICHELIN Trademark. Further, the Complainant asserts that the addition of the “guide” in all six disputed domain names reinforces the risk of confusion in the minds of Internet users – given the Complainant’s wide use of the term “guide” in combination with its MICHELIN Trademark.

The Complainant contends that the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interest in respect of the disputed domain names. In this regard the Complainant states:

- (a) that it has not authorized any third party to identify itself as "MICHELIN" or as any of the six disputed domain names;
- (b) the MICHELIN Trademark is not generic but a "distinctive and famous trademark" owned by it;
- (c) there appears to be no legitimate reason why the Respondent would incorporate the Complainant's well-known trademark in the disputed domain names, given that the Complainant has been using its mark in gastronomy reviews for more than 120 years;
- (d) finally, the Complainant contends that the Respondent has registered and is using the six disputed domain names in bad faith. The Complainant asserts the Respondent was clearly aware of its MICHELIN Trademark which is widely known. Further, it asserts that the Respondent registered the disputed domain names because of their connection with the Complainant and its trademark in respect of goods and services in restaurants and gastronomy.

In regards to the bad faith registration and use, the Complainant points to the fact that the six disputed domain names resolve to a landing page which displays the Complainant's MICHELIN Trademark in relation to culinary activities of the MICHELIN Guide and also reproduced the MICHELIN Bibendum character. The Complainant states that this character (the Michelin man) is recognized as a brand ambassador or an emblematic brand icon of the Complainant.

The Complainant states that a substantial proportion of Internet users visiting the landing page at all six disputed domain names will be doing so in the expectation of reaching a site authorized by the Complainant. This will not be so and confusion will occur in respect of a substantial number of visitors.

The Complainant relies further on the fact that the Respondent has provided false or inaccurate information when registering the disputed domain names. Finally, the Complainant asserts that the Respondent is a "recidivist cyber squatter" who has been found to have undertaken bad faith registration and use of yet further domain names incorporating its MICHELIN Trademark (*Compagnie Generale des Etablissements Michelin v. Phil Howard, WIPO Case No. D2025-3318*).

B. Respondent

The Respondent did not reply to the Complainant's contentions.

6. Discussion and Findings

A. Identical or Confusingly Similar

It is well accepted that the first element functions primarily as a standing requirement. The standing (or threshold) test for confusing similarity involves a reasoned but relatively straightforward comparison between the Complainant's trademark and the disputed domain name. WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions, Third Edition, ("[WIPO Overview 3.0](#)"), section 1.7.

The Complainant has shown rights in respect of a trademark or service mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.2.1.

The Panel finds that the MICHELIN Trademark is recognizable within all six disputed domain names. All of the disputed domain names consist of the MICHELIN Trademark with the additional terms "guide" and "star" or "stars". Two of the disputed domain names add an additional "s" to the MICHELIN Trademark i.e., <guidemichelinsstar.com> and <guidemichelinsstar.net>. Previous panels have considered that the addition

in a disputed domain name of an additional letter or typo, or other terms is still sufficient for a disputed domain name to be confusingly similar to the relevant trademark for the purposes of the first element ([WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.8 and 1.9).

The Panel finds that the first element of the Policy has been established.

B. Rights or Legitimate Interests

Paragraph 4(c) of the Policy provides a list of circumstances in which the Respondent may demonstrate rights or legitimate interests in a disputed domain name.

Although the overall burden of proof in UDRP proceedings is on the complainant, panels have recognized that proving a respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in a domain name may result in the difficult task of “proving a negative”, requiring information that is often primarily within the knowledge or control of the respondent. As such, where a complainant makes out a *prima facie* case that the respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests, the burden of production on this element shifts to the respondent to come forward with relevant evidence demonstrating rights or legitimate interests in the domain name (although the burden of proof always remains on the complainant). If the respondent fails to come forward with such relevant evidence, the complainant is deemed to have satisfied the second element. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.1.

Having reviewed the available record, the Panel finds the Complainant has established a *prima facie* case that the Respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain names. The Respondent has not rebutted the Complainant’s *prima facie* showing and has not come forward with any relevant evidence demonstrating rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain names such as those enumerated in the Policy or otherwise.

The Panel finds the second element of the Policy has been established.

C. Registered and Used in Bad Faith

The Panel notes that, for the purposes of paragraph 4(a)(iii) of the Policy, paragraph 4(b) of the Policy establishes circumstances, in particular, but without limitation, that, if found by the Panel to be present, shall be evidence of the registration and use of a domain name in bad faith.

In the present case, the Panel finds that the disputed domain names have been registered in bad faith for the following reasons:

(a) the Complainant has clearly demonstrated that it has rights to its MICHELIN Trademark and that its trademark was well-known prior to registration of the disputed domain names. The Complainant has also provided evidence of its use of its MICHELIN Trademark for nearly 120 years in respect of services relating to restaurant guides. Previous panels have found that the Complainant’s MICHELIN Trademark is well-known or has developed a significant reputation. Such cases include *Compagnie Generale Des Etablissements Michelin v. Vaclav Novotny*, WIPO Case No. [D2009-1022](#) and *Compagnie Générale des Etablissements Michelin, Michelin & Cie v. Mitchell J. Newdelman*, WIPO Case No. [D2001-0512](#).

(b) the Panel finds that the Respondent had knowledge of the Complainant’s well-known MICHELIN Trademark. A trademark search of this mark or even a search entered into by an Internet search by the Respondent for that trademark would have unquestionably revealed the Complainant and its long-standing use of its MICHELIN Trademark. Further, the Respondent has been found by a previous panel in *Compagnie Generale des Etablissements v. Phil Howard*, WIPO Case No. [D2025-2532](#) to have registered in bad faith eight different disputed domain names incorporating the MICHELIN Trademark on June 10 and June 13, 2025. These activities were over a month prior to the registration of the disputed domain names in this case.

The Panel is also satisfied that the Respondent is using the disputed domain names in bad faith for the following reasons:

(a) the Panel is satisfied that the Respondent is seeking to take unfair advantage of the Complainant's well-known MICHELIN Trademark by using it to attract Internet users to the disputed domain names and the landing page linked to each of them. Internet users encountering the disputed domain names and the landing page located there will be led to believe that the services offered are provided by the Complainant when this is not the case.

This use appears designed to attract for commercial gain Internet users to the landing page by creating a likelihood of confusion. Internet users are likely to consider that the goods and services promoted and provided by the Respondent are authorized or licensed by the Complainant (when this is not the case).

(b) the Panel is entitled to draw and does draw an adverse inference from the failure of the Respondent to respond to the Complaint and to the factual allegations made by the Complainant.

(c) the Panel finds that the provision of false information to the Registrar as to the Respondent's address is further evidence of bad faith. The address provided to the Registrar is not an existing address.

The Panel finds that the Complainant has established the third element of the Policy.

7. Decision

For the foregoing reasons, in accordance with paragraphs 4(i) of the Policy and 15 of the Rules, the Panel orders that the disputed domain names <guidemichelinsstar.com>, <guidemichelinsstar.net>, <guidemichelinstar.com>, <guidemichelinstar.net>, <guidemichelinstars.com> and <guidemichelinstars.net> be transferred to the Complainant.

/Andrew Brown K.C./

Andrew Brown K.C.

Sole Panelist

Date: October 1, 2025