

The volkswagen golf sportline



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The two ads I selected, while marketing essentially similar ideas, are targeted toward two different demographics. The first ad, a print ad designed for the Volkswagen Golf Sportline, appeals to notions of power, excitement and adventure as they are commonly experienced by the young. The ad's most eye-catching feature is the expression of terror on the locust's face. He is clearly being menaced by an unseen force coming down the road which can only be the sporty auto for which this campaign was designed.

The initial appeal is comic. The locust's face is a cartoonist expression designed to bring laughter out of the viewer. As anyone can attest, shared laughter is one of the most powerful social bonding mechanisms experienced by humans and the advertiser wants you to laugh along with them at the cartoon locust's plight. The environment around the locust is only a road, the frame being split in to dramatic, though essentially featureless planes. The intention here is to draw the viewer toward the intended message: the vehicle is off-camera is powerful, more powerful than nature and all the world feels terror at its approach.

Thus, the driver of the vehicle can see themselves as a projection of that power, the master of that which nature itself cannot tame. While the viewer shares this experience of terror, however comic, with the locust, he—and I do believe that this ad is probably directed at a largely male audience—is supposed to see himself as the force of nature, embodied in the car, which encompasses the locust's ultimate doom. This ad is a concept wrapped around a car. A car, of course, is capable of traveling at speeds seldom seen in nature. It is the ultimate master of the road and the poor locust sees it's rapid approach a bit too late for his own good.

But, is the locust anything more than a comic imperative to stop the reader as they page through the magazines in which this ad ran? I would argue that it is not. The locust is cheap emotional bait. The ad uses the element of mystery-the car is not even pictured-to sell its product. Whatever so terrified the locust bears further investigation. Whatever could raise such strong emotions of terror must necessarily raise equally strong emotions of power in those that make use of the products. Intellectually, this is an appeal to the rebel stereotype.

Where older auto ads often emphasized elegance, design and luxury, things mostly associated with those who are established and, presumably, wealthy enough to afford them, this ad appeals to the wild male impulse so celebrated in our society. The driver off screen is not a retiree driving a luxury sedan nor are they a mother with a minivan full of children on their way to soccer practice. This driver is sheer power, flying down the road at the speeds only sports cars can offer, unconcerned with the world around him and unbound by its restrictions. Note the explosive use of color, expression and emotion. This ad is designed to detonate in the viewer's mind as the page is turned. It is meant to make them at first laugh and then consider the open road on which the locust stands, the infinite horizon that makes up the background and the freedom offered to explore both road and horizon free of the burden of responsibility to the world around the viewer.

This image, while undeniably witty and well-designed, is selling the concept of adventure. While the urge for adventure and reasonable risk-taking are healthy and constructive, they certainly need not be so callous to the world around them nor can they truly be embodied in an automobile. The second

ad is more visually and intellectually and emotionally complex, if not quite so well-designed. Aimed at a more conservative audience, a family excitedly uses binoculars to look through the “fourth-wall”, presumably at some magnificent horizon. A view the audience could share if they only laid down the cash for the RV in the background.

Again, we see the environment being defined by a device which undeniably poses one of the most serious threats to it. Here, it is the RV. Serene, comfortable, luxurious and designed to carry the driver and, presumably, their entire family on long-ranging adventures with all the comforts of home readily available. These people, while still dominating their environment, are curious and wholesome; a far cry from the implied rebel piloting the VW in the first advertisement.

Additionally, this ad isn't so much concerned with selling the vehicle as with selling the lifestyle which demands the vehicle, though it does some of both. The right side of the ad contains the opening verse from “American The Beautiful”. The song, as nostalgic as the ad itself, describes the breadth and variety of landscapes that make up the US. In referencing this song, the reader is lead to believe that RVing is an activity which connects them somehow with their heritage as Americans. The idea of traversing the country, particularly the west, is a national fixation with Americans and the advertisement manages to transform the real reasons for that initial exploration-national expansion, escaping the poverty of life in the cities, sometimes plain old greed-into an innocent activity that literally leads to broader horizons.

It cannot go without notice that the American family pictured is almost comically outdated. The boy wears a cowboy hat, imitating the first Western explorers to reach the same vistas as has he. Mother and daughter stand side by side, father stands to the rear protecting the youngest child. Behind it all sits the RV that allowed them to experience such wonder.

The middle or working class family pictured would likely be unable to budget the gas required to drive such a machine down the road these days. Today, the children would more likely be glued to a hand-held video game device than peering with such awe through binoculars at the world around them. This ad, like the VW ad, is selling something that driving an auto cannot realistically provide. This ad is selling nostalgia to a nostalgic audience.

The gearshift has a setting for “ explore”. The song and text appeal to nostalgia and the use of color seems to imitate the overly-saturated images seen on the sort of postcards that are sold in roadside tourist-traps. It is a safe world in which this family lives, a world whose roads are not plagued by the sort of driver who might be at the wheel of the VW. Both ads are designed, and perhaps effective, at marketing vehicles as lifestyles. Cars and RVs, in reality, are simply means of transportation. Both are expensive, polluting and tend to isolate the driver from their environment.

Sports cars, while able to go at great speeds, are more often seen traveling at the speed limit, as are all other cars, their drivers not headed toward some grand adventure so much as headed toward the grocery store or work. Of course, one could accomplish those things with a much slower vehicle or with no vehicle at all but reminding the audience of that would not sell cars.

The RV, while portrayed as a means to escape and explore, would in reality be an expensive product that is expensive to operate. The irony of the RVing ad is that, while it promises to enable the whole family to experience the joys of their country and their environment, all of them are peering through binoculars toward a horizon to which there is apparently no road at all. As for getting to this vantage point, the RV club wouldn't want to remind the viewer that they could have driven a compact car to the same location—the presence of an RV implies that there is no harsh terrain to traverse—perhaps they could have biked or even hiked. Again, the experience of nature and one's country is not what's being sold, despite it being the intended impression.

What is being sold is the lifestyle that goes with traveling about the country in an RV, if there is such a thing. Whether the use of a vehicle is portrayed as a means of mastering nature or experiencing it, it is unnecessary to both and detrimental to at least the latter. Behind the vista being taken in by the RVing family lies, perhaps, a field of oil wells. On the road in the VW driver's wake lies a dead locust who existed only to stand in awe before the awesome power of humankind. What both ads have in common is that they trade in fictions. A car will not make you fast, the car will be fast with or without you.

RVing will not awaken a sense of wonder in a child that cannot be awakened by exploring one's own backyard. In fact, RVing is not even a lifestyle, it is an activity. And exploration is not a setting on an automatic transmission, it is the human need to expand ourselves; something which cannot be sold in the form of gears, steel and rubber. Sources Volkswagen Golf Sportline Print Ad ; <https://assignbuster.com/the-volkswagen-golf-sportline/>

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