

The Age **Green Guide 3**

Give us a break!

Advertising: it's the art of arresting human intelligence long enough to get money from it. But TV advertising, writes David Dale, is often more entertaining than the shows. Especially over summer

FOR THOSE OF US WHO must put up with TV advertising (you can't watch the ABC all the time), the gap between irritation and affection — the point at which the nostalgia level on the way up passes the nausea level on the way down — seems to be about eight years.

That has certainly been the assumption of the various ad agencies that have been connected with Louie The Fly over the years. The skinny black bug (allegedly created by a youngster named Bryce Courtenay at the Hanson Ribbonsmith agency) started leaving his sinister trail on babies' blankets in 1957, buzzed back briefly in 1962, had a makeover and returned in 1971, then disappeared until 1979 and enjoyed a triumphant revival in 1986. He has been on our screens every summer since then.

But he's not the same, is he? Now that we see Louie all the time, we don't think so fondly of him — a case of too much of a good thing, perhaps. That's the reason I have not included Louie The Fly in this list of Most Fondly Remembered Commercials.

The list is a personal selection of ads that stayed in my mind long after they had disappeared from television, even if I never bought the product. Other viewers would draw up different lists of favorites.

Some of the ads on my list won industry awards, but most didn't. Some tried to persuade us to do things that would damage our physical or mental health — but at least they entertained us in the process.

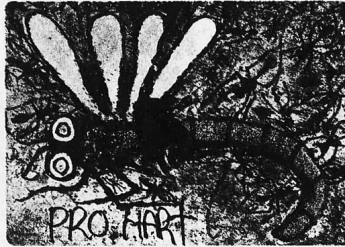
The ad industry has no interest in commercials that draw more attention to themselves than to the product.

An ad can be beautiful, inspiring, hilarious, exciting and expensive to make, but if it doesn't sell product, it's a failure. But I'm not in the ad industry, so sales success was not a criterion in this selection process.

For better or worse, these are my nominations for the ads that remain most unshakably embedded in the national consciousness:

The antz pantz
It makes 1989 seem very long ago when you realise it was the year when a commercial showing ants crawling up a young woman's leg was deemed so sexy that it could be shown only after 10.30 at night. Perhaps it was the way the young woman said "Sic em, Rex" to her pet antester.

The ad so offended some retailers that they refused to stock the new brand of briefs by Holeproof. But the commercial, which was made (and later re-made in a tamer version) by the Campaign Palace, Melbourne, found an eager audience among women aged 16 to 28. Within a year of the ad's first appearance, Antz Pantz had swallowed 10 per cent of the women's underwear market.



Aeroplane Jelly.
The great Aussie favourite.



Clayton's tonic
TURN on your TV set in the early '80s and you could hardly avoid seeing Jack Thompson in a pub delivering what was apparently the punchline to a joke "and now we can all get some sleep". A bunch of blokes had

a good laugh and then Jack revealed that he was consuming Clayton's. "It's the drink I have when I'm not having a drink." I doubt if the ad persuaded anybody to buy Clayton's — after all, the cheapest alternative to alcohol is

The total recall test

It's a funny thing about commercials: you hate them when they're on, but years later, you find that they're embedded in your consciousness — and you don't mind. Try this psychological test:

- 1 What's the gentlest tissue in the bathroom you can issue?
- 2 What puts a rose in every cheek?
- 3 What beats as it sweeps as it cleans?
- 4 You know what "the real thing" was, but what was "the real, real thing"?
- 5 Name the man, originally called "the Cambridge whistler", who went on to host game shows.
- 6 "A little each day is a good recipe" — of what, and what will the name imply?
- 7 What ought there to be a better word than delicious for?
- 8 What does amazing things to my system?
- 9 What would you buy when only the best will do?
- 10 What product was recommended by Plague the machinist?

The answers appear below. If you got more than 50 per cent correct, those who created the commercials earned their

- Answers**
- 1 Why do babies (to talk) use Kleenex?
 - 2 A Hoover vacuum cleaner.
 - 3 A Mopac.
 - 4 Charles O'Malley, the first character to be named after the astronomer.
 - 5 Tom Barber.
 - 6 Aeroplane Jelly. The quantity is half a tin.
 - 7 A Hoover vacuum cleaner.
 - 8 Plague the machinist.
 - 9 Why do babies (to talk) use Kleenex?
 - 10 Plague the machinist.

the mini-budget you're having when you're not having a mini-budget". Since then we've talked about Clayton's royal commissions, Clayton's recessions, even Clayton's love affairs. But do you know anybody who has ever drunk the tonic?

The Macquarie credits Noel Delbridge, creative director with an agency called D'Arcy-MacGurn & Mastius, as the inventor of the line. When I phoned DMGBB, the latest incarnation of that agency nobody there had ever heard of Noel Delbridge. So I was unable to get an answer to the problem that has been bugging me for 15 years: what the hell was the rest of the joke?

Dynamo's mother and son
THE ABC series *Mother And Son*, in which Ruth Cracknell made Gary McDonald's life miserable, was a brilliant tightrope act by its writer, Geoffrey Aldred. He managed to stay perfectly at the point between laughter and pain. When the characters first started promoting Dynamo liquid laundry detergent in 1989, I feared that a unique television relationship would be compromised, and I thought an ad agency must be insane to try to sell something with jokes about Alzheimers.

In fact, Foote Cone & Belding wrote the ads sensitively, softening the painful implications while retaining the spikiness of the relationship. Any other actors might have made the dialogue clunky, but Cracknell and McDonald made it seem real.

For viewers who had never seen the ABC series, the ads portrayed the universal problem of an adult son's relationship with his mum. For fans of the show, the *Dynamo* commercials became a Clayton's sitcom.

Mr Heinz
BACK in 1978, Robert Morley starred as a gluttonous food writer in the film *Who Is Killing The Great Chefs Of Europe?* An adman called Peter Keeble, at the agency Foote Cone & Belding must have remembered the film when he was looking for a celebrity to elevate the image of Heinz soups in the mid-1980s. He hired Morley to compliment Mr Heinz on his fine cuisine in a series of commercials.

The ads didn't convince me that Heinz made finer soups any better than anyone else, but I was grateful that they put one of the great comic actors of the 20th century back in the public eye. And I hope they enabled Morley to afford some great restaurant meals in the last few years of his life.

Duh duh duh Decoré
YOU didn't need to know the 1962 duo-woy song *Duke Of Earl* to sing along with the Decoré hair shampoo commercial when it first appeared on Australian screens in mid-1986. Apart from the catchy song, the ad was unusual because it showed ordinary-looking people miming in the shower instead of the usual models flinging their hair around in slow motion. The agency Magnus, Nankervis and Curt had been hired by Reckitt & Colman to transform Decoré's image from a high-quality expensive product to an everyday shampoo for the whole family.

According to Neil Shoebridge's book *Great Australian Advertising Campaigns*, the ad attracted huge initial sales for Decoré (and put a new version of *Duke Of Earl* on the hit parade), but people tended not to buy the shampoo a second time. "The product was not living up to

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