

Advertising Standards Authority

**Broadcast Advertising
Adjudications**

22 March 2006



ADVERTISERS IN THIS WEEKS REPORT

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ADVERTISER: Volkswagen Group (United Kingdom Ltd) t/a Skoda

AGENCY: Fallon Ltd

Date: 22 March 2006

Media: Television

No. of complaints: 37

COMPLAINT:

An ad for the Skoda Octavia featured a woman jumping off a bridge onto the roof of a speeding train. She moved along the train, ducked under a tunnel before smashing one of the carriage windows and swinging inside. She sat next to a man and said "Hi. Awful weather. You forgot this. Now, remember you're on at 10. Be there at least 15 minutes before, ok?". A voiceover said "Practical *and* exciting. You don't see that very often." The ad ended with a shot of the car while the voiceover said "The new Skoda Octavia VRS".

The ad was given an "ex-kids" scheduling restriction by the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre (BACC).

1. 33 complainants, including the Rail Safety and Standards Board, said that the shots of the woman jumping off the bridge onto the train and smashing the train window would set a bad example to young people and could result in vandalism to trains or railway property. They said that by making riding on top of the train seem exciting the ad would encourage emulation.
2. Six complainants said the ad was distressing and offensive. Five said the shot of the woman jumping from the bridge was similar to someone committing suicide and had upset them. One said that the ad was offensive because the scene of the window being smashed was reminiscent of the aftermath of railway accidents when windows had to be broken to rescue people.

ADJUDICATION:

1. Complaints not upheld

The BACC said that the ad had a cinematic quality and quickly established itself as being in the mould of an action film. They said that the shots of a staid and plainly dressed PA jumping from the bridge, making her way along the roof, ducking the bridge and smashing the window made it clear that the ad was intended to be entertaining and exciting rather than realistic. They did not feel that the ad was likely to adversely affect viewers' behaviour but they felt it was prudent to apply an "ex-kids" restriction to avoid any possibility of emulation by very young children.

Fallon said that the ad was the latest in a series of hyperbolic ads highlighting the surprising attributes of Skoda cars, the success of which was based upon the incongruity of the qualities mentioned, such as "practical and exciting", which was underlined by the end line in the voiceover "You don't see that very often". They said that, to create the sense of excitement of the Octavia vRS they wanted to communicate, they had used the familiar style of Hollywood action films, including sound effects, camera angles, music and

a scenario typical of these. They said that they had decided the ad should not be shown around children's programmes, a decision that was reinforced by the BACC's application of an "ex-kids" restriction. They had also made sure that the main character was not one likely to be seen by impressionable young people as an aspirational figure. They said that they had researched the idea with consumers and were reassured that it was an amusing way to communicate the disparate qualities of the car and that it would not be considered as likely to result in dangerous emulation.

The ASA considered that the ad would be recognised as a fantasy scenario by all but the youngest of viewers and that the acts depicted would not be seen as things that could or should be copied by viewers who would otherwise have been disinclined to do so. Nor did we consider the scenario would be seen as condoning the behaviour shown. We noted that the ad had been given an "ex-kids" restriction and considered that this was appropriate.

2. Complaints not upheld

The BACC said that they had carefully considered the impact that the ad was likely to have and decided that it was far removed from distressing events such as rail disasters or suicides. The fact that the woman checked her watch before the train arrived indicated that she did not intend to kill herself but was intent on keeping an appointment. They felt that, in the "action film" context of the ad, her jumping from the bridge was clearly a daring feat rather than a suicide attempt.

Fallon said that they had wanted to create what was clearly a fantasy world to exaggerate the "practical and exciting" theme in which the high-paced action was contrasted with the efficiency of the responsible PA, making the scenario ridiculous and comical. The character of a PA was chosen as she was the least likely type of person to carry out these stunts while, at the same time, her calm demeanour denoted that she was never in physical or emotional distress.

We considered that the ad quickly made clear, both by the way it was shot and by the behaviour and reactions of the characters, that the scenario depicted was a fantasy more akin to an action film than real life. While we noted that some of the complainants felt that the ad was distressingly evocative of real life events and appreciated their concerns, we considered that the tone and content of the ad were clearly removed from reality and unlikely to cause widespread offence or personal distress.

The ad was investigated under CAP (Broadcast) TV Advertising Standards Code rules 6.1 (Offence), 6.4 (Personal distress), 6.7 (Health and safety), 7.3.1 (Mental harm - children), 7.3.2 (Physical harm - children) and 7.3.7 (Use of scheduling restrictions) and CAP (Broadcast) Rules on the Scheduling of Advertisements rule 4.2.3 (Treatments unsuitable for children) but was not found in breach.