



JEAN SHEPHERD

Detroit goes Hollywood.

• It is time to record what seems to me to be an almost painfully obvious fact: in today's world, the commercial has become as important to the car as the differential or the transmission. It's been an established principle in the cereal biz that the *box* and the *name* of the crunchie are what it's all about. It follows that what most people buy is a jazzy box or a name that promises eternal life, glamour, excitement, fun or a combination of all of the above. Naturally, incredible amounts of money are spent designing a box or coming up with a name.

Take the Aspen. What in God's name does an Aspen, which is a small tree, have to do with a car? Is this a trend? Will we soon see the Cadillac Norway Pine, or the Buick Deciduous Poplar? And the commercials for the Aspen fling open new doors to the fantasy land. Admittedly, Rex Harrison looks a little embarrassed squatting in the front seat of an Aspen, saying "Unbelievable!" over and over. Yet surrounded by a bevy of ladies in Edwardian dress and accompanied by a musical score drawn from *My Fair Lady*, Rex is plainly a pioneer. No doubt ad agencies are already trying to contract everybody from Dustin Hoffman to Lee Marvin.

For example, can't you just see George C. Scott, in his full General Patton battle dress wearing gleaming desert goggles and nickel-plated .45s, as the commercial opens? I see the scene this way:

In the foreground of our opening shot, we see a small, rocky hill set in a blazing desert reminiscent of North Africa. Suddenly, amid a great roar, an enormous, snarling truck grille fills the scene. The sound track features the muttering rumble of distant German 88s, exploding *Minenwerfer* and the drone of a strafing JU-87. Suddenly Scott's face fills the screen and he bellows: "Goddammit, you G.I. sons of bitches, get your ass in gear. I'm gonna lead this spearhead to hell in my new Kenworth Three Thousand." The KW's engine booms menacingly as diesel fumes blast out of the twin red-hot exhausts. "We're all gonna die, so let's die in style in a brand new 400-horsepower, cab-over Kenworth. Let's go, you bastards!"

How's that for a commercial? I predict

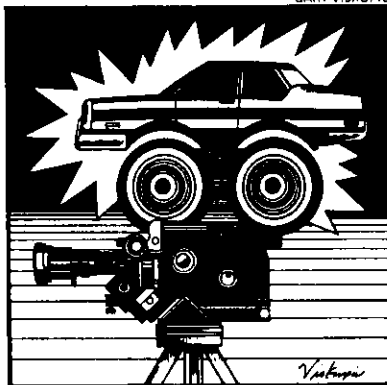
that it won't be long before you'll be seeing spots very much like it.

Or how's this? We see a dark scene on a deserted Los Angeles street, lit only by a dim streetlight. An automobile glides into view—long, flat and pale blue in color. We see a tubby hunched figure, unsmiling, at the wheel. He speaks in a rich *sotto voce* into a mobile telephone: "Lieutenant, Frank Cannon here. I've got the hit man for the Scungilli gang cornered in a house just off the Strip. Before I go in and get that no-good bum, I want you to know that I couldn't have come this far on the case without my '76 Lincoln Mark IV. For car chases and crash sequences, it's the best thing since the invention of the tire squeal and the echo chamber." Gunfire rattles from the darkened house, and we hear a voice scream out, "Cannon, you'll never take me alive!"

"Okay, Lieutenant," Cannon barks, "I'm going in. Ten-four." To the sound of distant police sirens, we get one last shot of the gleaming Mark IV grille.

Marlon Brando as the Godfather is, of course, a natural for Caddy. We hear a Sicilian *tarantella* and then a quick cut to a procession of sparkling black Cadillacs rolling silently bumper-to-bumper through the streets of a somber New Jersey town. At the head of the procession is an open-bodied black Cadillac hearse overflowing with white chrysanthemums. The *tarantella* changes subtly to a Sicilian dirge. In the back seat of one of the Cadillac limos, Brando as Don Corleone, his face puffy, jowls granite, croaks: "It is good that we

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honor today Gino Pasquale. He was a simple soldier.

He die for the Family. A Cadillac is none too good for a loyal soldier like Gino." Quick cut to shot of massive Cadillac grille and a shot of vast tires gliding through the rain. Brando's voice again, hissing and mean: "You want your family to go first class, you go Cadillac—or we bust your ass."

It goes without saying that John Wayne would have to star in a winner. Never for an instant are movie nuts fooled by the names the script writers hang on the great man. Be he Rooster Cogburn or a Civil War cavalry colonel named Claggett, he is John Wayne, and we all know that it was John Wayne Who Won the West.

Our commercial opens with the usual panoramic shot of mesas and craggy peaks, the arid sagebrush flatlands of the West. We see a tiny cloud of dust moving quickly over the plain. We zoom in to Jack Palance, dressed from head to foot in bad-man black. Amid frantic whinnying, he reins in. He stares for a moment into the blazing sun, takes a swig out of his rusty canteen, spits savagely at a rattlesnake, whips his horse and gallops on.

We cut to a dusty cow-town main street—Tarnation Gulch. Old codgers rock on sunbaked porches. Suddenly a horseman rides into town, a dead comrade slung over the saddle in front of him. Weary and haggard, he shouts: "Black Jack Slade is ridin' in. He's gonna shoot up the town. He got poor Luke."

Palance lopez into town. All have fled. Suddenly we see a cloud of dust at the end of Main Street. We zoom in. It is Wayne himself, sitting in the bouncing saddle of a four-wheel-drive Ford Bronco. The Bronco slews to a stop in front of the Silver Dollar. At the other end of the street, Palance leaps off his horse. The two men face each other in the classic walkdown. Legs stiff, they walk toward death. Wayne, his voice growling, says, "Slade, ever since you kilt my brother, I been after you. And you dumb varmint, believin' that crummy old horse of yours could outrun a Ford Bronco. Even a cross-eyed prairie dog knows better'n that. Ain't nothin' can outrun a Ford Bronco. Draw!"

Like lightning, Palance's hand streaks to his onyx-handled Colt .44. There is a crash of gunfire. Big John stands tall in the sun. In the dusty street, the prone figure, his arms outflung, is still in the hush of death. Wayne flings his star to the ground. "You can take back this piece of tin," he mutters, "it don't mean nothin'. Only my Ford Bronco counts. It's my only friend." He climbs into the saddle and drives slowly out of town. We fade out on a shot of vultures circling high in the sun.

As Professor Higgins would say, it *is* truly unbelievable. ●