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Eye On Ads: Nissan Titan Goes Big With Supercross

August 12, 2004

By Tiffany Meyers

This is an America of subcultures: from Trekkies to ravers to The Americans for Cloning Elvis. And the product that aligns itself with the right subculture gets one very targeted marketing campaign.

In the case of the Titan, Nissan's first full-size truck, TBWA\Chiat\Day, Los Angeles decided that the right subculture was Supercross, a motorcycle competition with a following of die-hard fans that live and breathe the extreme sport.

According to Jeffrey Kowalczyk, head of lifestyle marketing at TBWA\Chiat\Day, 76 percent of attendees to Supercross events drive big trucks. So TBWA made Nissan a proud sponsor of the Supercross Series, and partnered with KTM, a Belgian company with participating teams. "It all goes back to pushing sheet metal," he says.

This subculture, however, requires more than your typical hard sell. "We want to be naturally immersed in the culture and become a recognized member of the community," Kowalczyk says. So art director/creative director Erik Miller stepped in. A former motorcycle competitor, who'd be jumping a triple right now were it not for a knee injury, he knew fans would reject advertising that simply plunked a Titan in the middle of a motorcycle track. That truck had to earn its place. After researching photographers who did both sports and car photography, he called in Long Beach photographer Kirk Saylin. "Kirk has the ability to capture the emotion of a sport," says Miller. "You look at his pictures and get the feeling that you're right there." The duo created images that use car, sports, and portrait photography to put the truck in authentic situations.

"One of the problems with ad photography," says Saylin, "is that you tend to get labeled as a certain type of shooter. And that becomes all anyone wants to hire you for. You're seen as a fashion, or a food, or a car shooter. In reality it's how you see light and how you see the world that matters."

The campaign for Nissan includes two posters, one of which will be adapted into a print ad to run in motorcycle magazines, and the first of two Supercross trading card series, wisely produced without pink bubble gum. "Since I am the target audience," says Miller, the motorcyclist-turned-creative, "I thought, 'What kind of thing would I actually keep from a Supercross event?' I realized I'd want information. We decided to do something that provided information about the riders that fans couldn't get anywhere else." The front of each card shows one of six athletes performing a trick, while the back provides a portrait and information on their best jump, favorite track and other details.

In one of the two posters, Supercross star Grant Langston is captured in seven different air-born positions, assembled later in post-production, as he jumps over the Titan in a perfect arch. Both posters run with the tag: "Shift: Going Big." (The term "going big" refers to jumps that catch a lot of air, indicating that Nissan is on the inside and hinting that the Titan "goes big" in its own way).

"The Titan can hold all the bikes and all the gear," says Miller, "and it's just a mean truck out there on the road." But don't rush to the nearest Super K for your Supercross paraphernalia. The limited edition cards and posters are available only at Supercross events and autograph signings at Nissan dealerships.

www.saylinstudio.com

Creative Credits

Client: Nissan
Agency: TBWA\Chiat\Day, Los Angeles
Art Director/Creative Director: Erik Miller
Photographer: Kirk Saylin



© Nissan / Photo by Kirk Saylin

TBWA tapped Long Beach photographer Kirk Saylin to help position the Nissan Titan as the hip truck for Supercross fans.

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