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Eye On Ads: TBWA Gets Airborne For Nissan Campaign

April 07, 2005

By Tiffany Meyers

TBWA/Chiat/Day's successful poster campaign last year for Nissan, which shows several stars of Supercross in an array of airborne motorcycle jumps, set the bar high. The two posters, as well as a series of trading cards, fast became collector's items among Supercross enthusiasts and *Arts*. So when they began work on this year's follow-up poster, art director/creative director Erik Miller and Long Beach photographer Kirk Saylin knew they needed dazzle.

Their 17" by 60" panoramic poster, available only at Supercross events, doesn't disappoint. Set in a pristine expanse of sand dune in Glamis, California, a favorite haunt for motocross enthusiasts, the photo captures four stars of the Belgian Supercross team KTM in mid-air, performing a series of stunning jumps. Parked in the center of the landscape are the Nissan Titan and NISMO Frontier, as if the riders had driven them to the dunes for a day of devil-dare jumping. The riders as the most prominent visual elements in the composition, while the product is secondary.

"We wanted to keep the same theme as the original poster," says Saylin, "which is to immerse Nissan within the sport without looking like an ad. No one's going to take a picture of a truck and put it up on their wall. But if you immerse your product in the sport that they love--and really in the poster the sport comes first--what people are doing is picking up the sport they love and taking the product with them."

The shoot wasn't without its challenges. After scouting out a clean stretch of sand, Saylin and Miller later returned to find out a mix of rain and riding had carved up the sand with ugly motorcycle tracks. Luckily, Saylin had taken quick shots of the dunes during the scout, which he was able to drop in later. The final ad is comprised of five images stitched together to make the panoramic.

On the day the team was scheduled to shoot the riders at their test track in Corona, Calif., only two of the four riders were available. Rather than throw in the towel, the creatives asked Jay Marmont to appear as both himself and as Nathan Ramsey, while Ryan Mills would appear as himself and Josh Hansen. Interestingly, Marmont had no problem showing off for the camera as himself, but when he posed as Ramsey, the team noticed he was holding back. "There's a little competition between those two," says Miller, "so he didn't want to do anything really cool, and it took a while for him to loosen up. Finally, we got a good shot." Finally indeed; the shot used for the poster represents the day's last shutter click.

Not that any of these challenges curbed Saylin's newfound admiration for the sport. "These guys ride these bikes as if they're one with them," says Saylin. "They're so much more graceful than I thought they would be, because you think of it as a rough and tumble sport, but they glide along, and it's beautiful to watch them." He adds: "I almost felt like there was too much eye candy to grab."

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© Nissan / Photo by Kirk Saylin
Long Beach photographer Kirk Saylin continues his collaboration with TBWA\Chiat\Day.

Creative Credits

Client: Nissan North America, Inc.
Agency: TBWA\Chiat\Day, Los Angeles
Creative Director/Art Director/Illustrator: Erik Miller
Creative Director: Joe Shands
Executive Creative Director: Rob Schwartz
Illustrator: Steve Ramdhani
Photographer: Kirk Saylin
Print Producer: Bob Daniels

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