

Living la Vida Nissan

TBWA's inventive campaign stars a man, a car and a life

Marc Horowitz, the 30-year-old breakout star of "Seven Days in a Sentra," has curly hair, big teeth and such an engagingly oddball manner that at first I thought he was actor Jon Heder of *Napoleon Dynamite* fame.

But he never once mentions Tater Tots or says "sweet." Instead, to bring "The next generation Sentra. You could pretty much live in it" tagline to life, he tells us the rules of his Nissan deal. He not only has to live out of the car for a week (no cheating and going home to shower), but he also has to go to work during the day (at his job as a photographer's assistant), prepare four meals within the vicinity of the auto, go on at least one date, host one social function (a poker party) and, finally, "maintain the highest standards of personal hygiene."

The last is key. If there is one thread running through the entire comic oeuvre—seven TV spots, which roll out through November, 13 Webisodes, special online executions, a MySpace profile and a two-minute film—it's Marky Mark's attention to his funky pits. Perhaps the creators have invented a powerful new subset of the reality genre—pitsploitation. The first spot, showing Horowitz loading up his enormous pile of "stuff" into the super-wide trunk, is attention-getting and entertaining. But easily the most memorable part is his pointing to his underarm and worrying that, in the course of the filming, he might accrue "some funk under here."

Indeed, while it's selling the Sentra, the experience practically cries out for an Axe product placement (Nissan agency TBWA



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does lavish various Apple merchandise on the guy). We see Horowitz pouring cold bottled water over his bare chest, showering under lawn sprinklers, spraying himself with a double-barreled set of deodorant cans as he jogs, and putting on what he refers to as "smell good" in his office bathroom to prepare for his date.

Aside from his take-no-prisoners' stance on pungency, Horowitz also does a lot of effortless product demos. In "Day 6," for example, the set-up seems pretty inviting, even for those with homes. After a hard day at work, Horowitz gets into his car, which is in a public garage, changes into his jammies, folds his front seat back (the rear seats also fold) and prepares for an evening of Sentra-based entertainment (Sentra-tainment?). He plugs his iPod into the MP3 input jack and watches *Nacho Libre*, quoting the line "My powers are coming back to me" with no accent at all, which is funny. But a man's got to eat, so he uses his fancy, voice-activated Bluetooth phone system to call for a delivery of a "large cheese" pie. When asked for the address, he tells the pizza lady, "I see a P2 [parking lot sign] over there. Does that help you out?"

Still, the concept is hardly groundbreaking: The agency created a docu-journey that chronicled a couple on the "Road to Rio" in their Pathfinder almost 20 years ago. Speaking of going south, the tone of the current exploit could have come off as insensitive as more home loans are going into delinquency among middle-class people these days, never mind the actual growing numbers of homeless families who do

have to live out of their cars.

But the genius here is in the casting: Horowitz's good-natured, quirky, inventive and flexible approach to life is delightful to watch. (Even when the car is Saran Wrapped or he's getting towed.) Running around in his striped bathrobe (hey, the man has some modesty and decorum), offering up his favorite talismans—like a set of bug-eyes and his lawn gnome—our car keeper is like a cross between Jim Halpert (played by John Krasinski), the tall, quiet guy on *The Office* (who has the as-yet-unrequited crush on the receptionist) and a less jackassy *Jackass* dude—the non-conformist, soft-spoken, creative version.

In reality, Horowitz, among other things, has been an "environmental performance artist," pulling off such stunts as carrying people on his back from store to store and riding a donkey to work. Given his artistic bent, I see him less in a brand new shiny red Sentra and more in an old beater car. (Although one of the spots, involving a free car wash, cleverly shows the Sentra's great gas mileage.)

Clearly, the campaign is trying to "youthify" the redesign and shed the "mom car" image. The creators want to appeal to successful young urbanites who, after gym, work and socializing, are rarely home, meaning that living in the car is more than a metaphor.

But I'm thinking it might speak to an older target, since I'm a mom-person and I love it. Perhaps that's the secret sauce in this documentary—that it will result in bonus sales from parents who are desperate to get their grown-up kids out of the nest. Hey, a nice new Nissan is a start and it's got some sweet options, although the shower needs some work.

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