

Untamed joy in the New Golf



Rescued Lucky feels quite at home on the back seat of the New Golf

The New Golf commercial which first aired in early May this year, is a heart-warming story which broke new ground in the world of television commercials. The central idea builds a narrative around events and real life heroes. Fiction found truth in a wildlife sanctuary in Namibia and brought the remarkable story of a cheetah called Lucky and a devoted animal lover, Marlice van Vuuren to the hearts of South Africans.

THE IDEA

Volkswagen's advertising agency, Ogilvy Cape Town, conceptualised a unique television commercial for the New Golf, just launched in

South Africa. The commercial portrays the soulful enjoyment that can be experienced when driving in the sixth generation Golf.

Executive Creative Director of Ogilvy, Chris Gotz explains, "Our aim was to capture the exhilaration and joy of driving the New Golf. During our brainstorm, we read about people using driving as therapy and this fact, combined with knowledge of how dogs behave in cars, led to us dreaming up what we hoped would become a memorable image: an injured cheetah – the world's fastest animal – with its head out of the window of a Golf, enjoying the wind and recalling the exhilarating feeling of speed that all cheetahs are born to feel."

THE TRUE STORY

One of the directors Ogilvy briefed for the advert was Henry-Alex Rubin – a New York-based documentary filmmaker and commercials director. He wanted to find a real story in Africa for the commercial. With the assistance of the local production company Gatehouse, Henry-Alex searched the continent and, remarkably, found conservationist, Marlice van Vuuren in Namibia who drives a three-legged cheetah around in her car during rehabilitation at N/á'an ku sê Wildlife Sanctuary.

In January this year, Marlice received a call from someone who had caught a pair of cheetah cubs – a brother and sister. The brother had been caught in a box trap but



The New Golf television commercial was an ambitious project which set out to reflect the exhilarating thrill of driving the New Golf. Shot documentary style, this commercial is unique and unlike any other car commercial

By Tanja Van Wie
Photos: Andrew Watson

New York-based filmmaker, Henry-Alex Rubin captures a soundbyte of Lucky the cheetah panting



his sister had been caught using a potentially lethal steel jaw gin trap.

Marlice and her team went to the aid of the female cub but unfortunately, the ligaments in one foot were so badly torn that her entire back leg had to be amputated. The operation went smoothly and the female cub was named 'Lucky' for having lived through her barbaric capture. With Marlice's help, Lucky has coped remarkably well on three legs but her chances of survival in the wild would be incredibly slim so it seems she has found a permanent home at N/a'an ku sê.

On hearing this story Henry immediately flew to Namibia, at his own expense and filmed crucial scenes of Lucky having her



Marlice van Vuuren is one of Namibia's best-known conservationists

stitches removed and taking her first steps after the operation. Instead of truth meeting fiction, this was fiction meeting truth.

THE SHOOT

"Marlice proved to be such an inspiring, larger-than-life personality that we adapted the script to focus on her and her real story. She runs the N/a'an ku sê Wildlife Sanctuary in Namibia where the bulk of the shoot was filmed," Chris states.

At N/a'an ku sê, Marlice relocates animals found on or near farmlands such as wild dogs, baboons, and lions. In the case of injured animals, she rehabilitates them and gives them a life on her farm.

“Since Lucky would never return to the wild, Marlice committed herself to rehabilitating her as best she could. Her tenderness and care was inspiring to watch.

We filmed her going about her work, including using many unconventional techniques to strengthen the cheetah’s remaining hind leg: running with her dogs, playing with tennis balls and feather dusters, even using her son’s remote control car,”

says Chris. “Marlice named the cheetah ‘Lucky’ because she is lucky to be alive. In a sense, we too were lucky as we never expected to chance upon such a beautiful, touching true story that lined up so well with our dreamed-up idea.”

The commercial was shot in March 2009 over three days. Apart from the three heroes (Marlice, Lucky and the New Golf) the commercial also features wild

dogs, baboons and even Marlice’s dogs. The beautiful surroundings, wildlife and Namibia’s famous big blue skies also contribute to the underlying message of all Golf commercials: “For the love of the drive”. And Golf has always been about the love of the drive.

THE CAR

Chris says the New Golf, was an essential

VOLKSWAGEN’S AWARD-WINNING COMMERCIALS

The GTI “Dream” commercial was a massive hit with consumers and with the industry itself. In March this year the commercial clinched Volkswagen’s International ad of the year in the most coveted television category. This was huge recognition for Volkswagen South Africa in the presence of 60 other markets. Carrin Merkel, Marketing Communications Manager for Volkswagen South Africa said, “Congratulations to everyone who worked on this commercial! It certainly is an enormous achievement to be number one in the world in the television category.”

The GTI “Dream” commercial was in the top three most liked commercials in South Africa in 2008 and won a Loerie Award and a number of other awards internationally. “At its heart it is a classic Golf advert – an idea that centres on a guy and the amazing driving experiences his Golf gives him,” comments Chris Gotz, Executive Creative Director of Ogilvy Cape Town. “Golf is, and always has been, the driver’s car. If you talk to Golf drivers you get a sense that they really love driving. So drivability and the love of the drive, is at the heart of every Golf advert.

“Of all the adverts we ever work on, car commercials are probably the toughest. Every year thousands of car adverts are done all over the world, so it becomes more difficult to create an idea that has never been done and is fresh for the category. On a Golf brief that pressure is even more intense. It just has to be a great advert. We raise the bar by working our butts off, and never being satisfied with anything other than great,” adds Chris.



On location at N/a’an ku sê Lodge and Wildlife Sanctuary in Namibia

part of the process. “It handled well on the dusty, bumpy Namibian roads, clinging to the shoulder on the narrow stretch where we captured most of the driving shots. Marlice herself said it was the best car she’d ever driven.”

THE FINAL CUT

“The result of all the brainstorming, research, meetings and filming is a


commercial that feels different to anything else on TV,” says Chris. “Throughout the entire process, our aim was to guard and maintain the story’s integrity, because that’s where its beauty and power lies. At the end of months of work, we believe we have created an advert that looks like no other car commercial, yet its authentic message is one that only Volkswagen could have told.” 

Photo: Tonym de Klerk



Henry-Alex Rubin directed the American documentary movie, *Murderball*, which was nominated for an Academy Award

