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## Gladys Knight playing rugby and a flying '72 Impala: Must be Super Bowl ad time

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NEW YORK — There were plenty of tried-and-true techniques used in this year's Super Bowl ads — talking animals, Clydesdale horses, celebrity cameos. But then came Gladys Knight as a rugby player, an airborne '72 Impala and a "Mama's Boy" action figure who was somehow plugging anti-perspirant.

If last year's flatulent horses and crotch-biting dogs tested the limits of good taste, a number of this year's crop tested the limits of credulity.

Granted, this is where the advertising industry makes big plays and takes big chances. Advertisers expect to get a bang for each one of the 2.4 million bucks that they splash out for a 30-second spot, the most expensive TV ad time by far. But with an audience of nearly 90 million, plenty of companies think it's worth it.

This year, a number of newcomers took out their first-ever Super Bowl ads, including Volvo, with a clever spot featuring airline mogul Richard Branson going into space in a rocket. A sticker on the side of the rocket boasts that his other vehicle is a Volvo. This ad even comes with its own promotion, giving viewers a chance to sign up to win a trip into space on commercial space flights Branson is planning.

Other first-timers included GoDaddy.com, a vendor of Web site names, which took a chance with a racy ad poking fun at the uproar over Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" of last year; and Ameriquest Mortgage Co., which ran a fun but slightly quizzical spot in which a shopper gets maced, whacked with a bat and then zapped with a cattle prod after the shop owners mistakenly think he's holding them up.

Lincoln ran a funny ad toward the beginning of the game in which a tough group of bikers is scared away from a roadside diner after seeing a line of Lincoln trucks parked in front. The gang of Hell's Angels lookalikes is spared embarrassment when one of them sheepishly suggests that the salad bar up the road is better anyway.

Several of this year's ads were definitely puzzlers. Gladys Knight appears as a rugby player in a pitch for the credit card issuer MBNA Corp.; both MC Hammer and a '72 Impala come flying over a backyard fence in a spot for Lay's potato chips; and Unilever unveiled a complete head-scratcher for its Degree anti-perspirant featuring an action figure called "Mama's Boy," a grown man who still gets pushed around in a shopping cart by his mom.

### RESOURCES

- **Super Bowl 2005:** Preview some of the commercials to be broadcast during Sunday's big game.
- **Super Bowl ads archive:** See television commercials from past years.

While some of this year's ads may have been somewhat off, they were a far cry from the spots last year that offered crude jokes, including an accidental bikini wax for Cedric the Entertainer, and a guy who squeals in delight when a blast of cold air blows up his kilt, Marilyn Monroe-style.

In a sign of this year's heightened sensitivities, Lincoln pulled a spot for its new truck at the last minute after victims of priest abuse complained that it made light of their experience. In its place, Lincoln's parent company Ford Motor Co. used the air time to rerun a separate ad for its new Mustang convertible.

Other ads made clever references to pop culture. Pepsi, a perennial Super Bowl advertiser, even referred to one of its own classic ads by showing Cindy Crawford ogling a plain-dressed but hunky guy walking along and sipping on a can of Diet Pepsi as the theme from "Saturday Night Fever" plays in the background. Crawford herself was the star of a 1992 Pepsi ad where two young boys ogled her as she pulled into a dusty gas station and quaffed a Pepsi in slow motion.

But this being 2005, after Crawford and numerous other women are stopped in their tracks by the hunkalicious Diet Pepsi drinker, there's one more pair of eyes caught by the passing stud: those of "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" host Carson Kressley.



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