AD WATCH

Thank you for not smoking additives

"In domestic tobacco, although settlement-related expenses significantly reduced operating profit in the quarter, we were encouraged with early results from Reynolds Tobacco's new repositioning of the Winston brand." Steven F Goldstone, chairman and chief executive officer, in RJR Nabisco's third quarter report—1997.

Mr Goldstone might well be encouraged. The era of Joe Camel, the Marlboro man, and the other brand icons may be coming to an end, but RJ Reynolds' marketing mavens have seen the future and they have got there first, riding a pack of Winstons. "No bull", just like the ads say.

The Winston campaign, which began last summer, has revived a brand that had been dropping in popularity for more than a quarter of a century. In a December 1997 article ("All-natural killers"), *Fortune* magazine reported that Winston had grown from 5.4% to 5.8% in the third quarter of 1997. It's not surprising that Mr Goldstone was so "encouraged", especially when a single point of market share equals US\$80 million in pre-tax profits.

The Winston campaign has not gone unnoticed in political circles. In March 1997, the state of Arizona filed legal action against RJ Reynolds, trying to force removal of its billboards. As reported in the *Arizona Daily Star*, state Attorney General Grant Woods charged that "the campaign by RJ Reynolds violates Arizona's consumer fraud laws because it implies that Winston is somehow more healthful than competitors."

And how exactly does Winston make its deceitful appeal? With something for everyone,

and layers of meaning in each ad. Are you a jaded worker? "I get enough bull at work. I don't need to smoke it." Here's some freedom from your stultifying job, and a little jab at anyone who bugs you about your smoking.

Are you today's woman smoker? "My buns might not be steel, but my butt's all tobacco." You can laugh at your "dumb" fitness video (the "buns", "abs", and thighs-of-steel series is very popular in the United States), but you smoke a smart, pure product. If you find the tobacco-butt image funny, that's cool, but the model is not butt-ugly. She's actually drop-dead gorgeous. So good-looking, in fact, that you'll be interested in everything that goes in her mouth.

Speaking of butts, figure 1 shows the most vulgar ad in the series: A man who appears to have his head "straight up" his hind quarters. "Still smoking additives?" is the existential question being asked.

As for the troubling campaign in Arizona, how about this in-your-face statement?: "Your car lighter wasn't meant for a cell phone." Firing up a cigarette becomes a noble, higher calling.

But the acme of Winston's art is the elegant, minimalist "Thank you for not smoking additives" (figure 2). A cherished, respectful tobacco control message has been turned on its ear by adding just one word. We're not afraid of anti-smoking messages, Winston is saying, and we're so fearless that we happily offer you this cheeky reminder. However, if you are a thoughtful smoker, and genuinely troubled by those 599 potential additives,

don't worry. We offer you "100% Tobacco. True taste. No bull."

Oh yes, we're also selling just enough rebellion to meet your needs. We're willing to hint at the naughty word "bullshit" in this mainstream magazine. (The ads have appeared in *People*, *Esquire*, *US*, and *Rolling Stone* magazines.) We'll even compare our natural smokes to the surgically enhanced breasts of *Playboy* models (see the ad below from the back cover of the magazine's July 1998 issue).

In George Orwell's 1984, the main character was Winston Smith. He smoked Victory cigarettes. For Winston cigarettes, 1997 and 1998 are bearing witness to a happy revival of a 1984 motto: IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH. Yes, and Winston will "liberate" smokers from additives, but as another Orwellian truth would have it, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY.

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Addendum

The 29 June 1998 issue of *Advertising Age* recognised "The Marketing 100"—"those visionaries who latch onto an idea, run with it and achieve their goal of greater sales or recognition." Included among this distinguished assemblage was Ned Leary, vice-president of marketing for Winston, for the brand's "new 100% no-additive positioning". *Ad Age* credited the new campaign for the brand's recent sales growth (3% increase in the first quarter of 1998 compared with the first quarter of 1997). "We didn't need a campaign. We needed an attitude," said Leary. "We spent two years optimizing the communication. . . . You either reinvent yourself against the competition or you'll lie in a ditch. . . . My share of market is going in a different direction for the first time in 20 years." No word from Leary or *Ad Age* on movement of the brand among youth.—ED