

The Bugs and the Bees

A man is covered with bees. What is he selling? The copy gives you a clue: "Hey, there's a blue one." A blue what? Ah. The object of interest is the new VW Beetle, barely noticeable in the background.

"It's a simple misdirect," says Arnold Worldwide copywriter David Weist. The joke is subtle, in keeping with the VW Bug theme. "The idea is, you'll always notice this car, no matter what else is happening," explains art director Don Shelford.

Not surprisingly, the bee-man image has its own story. "This was a 'bee beard' contest," says Shelford. "I think the guy was trying to break the world record." Shelford spotted the image in an online search for outlandish photos, but it took Arnold weeks to track down the subject. Bee-contest aficionados were shown the photo, says Shelford, but responded with comments like, "Well, I may have seen him before, but his face is covered up." Eventually senior art buyer Carol Alda found the man behind the beard: Max Beck. The picture was taken by Christopher Morris in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1985, who licensed the picture to Stockphoto.com. Both Beck and Morris gave Arnold permission to use the photo.

Besides an arresting image, Shelford and Weist also focused on the ad's tone. "We wanted to keep it as photojournalistic as we could," says Shelford, "as if this was a situation you could just happen to come across on a walk." The situations are staged, but they don't look incredibly staged. Other ads in the campaign also contrast bizarre, realistic images with a Beetle discreetly in the background. Photographer Bill Cash has been shooting the new Beetle campaign for several years. "Don sent me these layouts, so we scouted...for places [that] matched the photos," he says. "We looked for an open light situation, and then we mimicked the lighting of the existing shot." Cash used a Fuji medium-format camera and Fuji film, eventually shooting "Bee Guy" at Whitman Airport, in Burbank.

The retouching fell to Jeff Satterthwaite and Josh Zuercher of Liquid Pictures. "In that particular shot, the lighting on the car didn't exactly match the surroundings of the hero shot," says Liquid Pictures rep Meredith Ott. "The photographer did a great job, but since the car ended up being underneath a tree, it changed how the lighting was done. We relit the car, so light was coming from the top and the back, as opposed to being lit strongly from the side. . . . We inserted the shot of the car into the background of the bees image, and then did a lot of manipulation in order to match the grain and the lighting and all those elements, so that it would look unified and organic." —Elizabeth Michaelson

Client: Volkswagen | Photographers: Bill Cash, Christopher Morris/Stockphoto.com
Client: Volkswagen | Agency: Arnold Worldwide
Creative Director: Alan Pafenbach | Art Director: Don Shelford

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