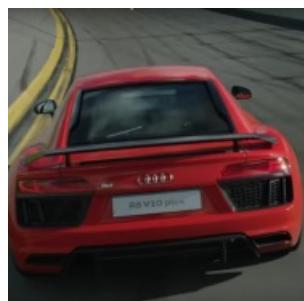


ADVERTISING

Audi leverages Bowie, Super Bowl to make a connection

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Audi R8 V10 plus

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

German automaker Audi is blasting off to showcase its latest vehicle in style.

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The Audi R8 V10 plus will feature during Super Bowl 50 this upcoming Sunday, Feb. 7, a surefire way to get more than a third of the United States population to take notice. A memorable Super Bowl commercial that strikes a chord with consumers can give a brand a long-lasting boost in awareness and generate desire and sentiment.

"Audi has had a tradition of impressive, memorable spots during the Super Bowl," said [Lauren Fix](#), automotive expert, Lancaster, NY. "Having a commercial that has people talking during the biggest sports event of the year leads to sales, social media chatter and extra coverage from entertainment and news outlets post event."

Ground control to The Commander

The 2017 R8 V10 plus is being billed as the brand's most powerful vehicle, as its 205 MPH top speed and 3.2 second 0 to 60mph acceleration suggest. The spot, entitled "The Commander," will air in a 60-second version during the first quarter of Super Bowl 50.

Audi's commercial focuses on a retired astronaut who learns to embrace life with the help of his new vehicle. Appropriate given the astronaut character, it features a segment of the song "Starman" by David Bowie, who passed away in early January.



Audi R8 V10 plus; image from The Commander

The commercial opens with shots of framed pictures of astronauts in full gear, with medals and other equipment plainly visible. In a recording, a voice says, "This has to be the proudest day of our lives" as the camera cuts to the astronaut framed in the photos, now much older, gazing intently but sadly at the memorabilia.

There is a cut to a full plate of food, at which point a woman says, "Not hungry, huh?" and takes it away. As concern is expressed about his not eating, another man, presumably his son, walks up to him and says, "Okay commander, come with me."

They walk outside, and just as there is a cut to the Audi R8 V10 plus, David Bowie's Starman begins to play. As the astronaut walks toward it, shots are intercut of him walking toward a rocket in flashback.

The introduction of music breaks up the somber tone, and the intercutting of "the proudest day of his life" with entering the R8 suggests that the Audi vehicle has revitalized his love of life.

Next, the commander and his son enter the car, and the father gives his son a look that mirrors one he gave before launching into space. A countdown is heard, and when the father starts the ignition, the gauges in the car start up and the rocket is shown launching into space as Starman reaches its chorus.

The car races along an empty road, graphically matched to the rocket shooting through the sky. Both passengers smile, and the 205 MPH top speed of the vehicle is spelled out over a blank screen.

Once again, the juxtaposition of the space flight and drive equates the two, selling the R8 not merely as a car but as a vehicle for memorable, life-changing experiences.

The Commander 90-second cut

Also live on Audi's YouTube channel is a longer, 90-second version. The longer spot has a few extra shots and lingers on the father and son before they enter the car and includes several more driving shots.

The scenario and experiential focus will likely make the commercial more memorable for viewers, who may be overwhelmed by the sentiment rather than focus on the sales pitch. The inclusion of Mr. Bowie's song so shortly after his death will only contribute to this and help forge a stronger connection with the brand.

Audi has a history of memorable Super Bowl spots. A 2008 parody of the iconic mob film "The Godfather" garnered much acclaim and helped to create space in the luxury vehicle segment for the brand.

Super Bowl advertising spots are notoriously expensive, with this year's rate being \$5 million per 30 seconds. However, no other ad offers a chance for so many impressions, as Super Bowl viewership regularly eclipses 110 million.

For this reason, The Commander is pitched to create desire and generate emotion, both of which will help brand Audi as an emotionally intelligent, desirable and experience-oriented brand. Although many viewers will not have the means to match Audi's \$162,900 asking price, the cultural cache of the spot will assist in brand positioning.

At the same time, because the R8 is a new vehicle, the spot will alert enthusiasts that it is now on the market.

Super Bowl ad spend

Automakers have long taken to cultivating desire as a prime TV advertising strategy, and research shows that luxury brands are particularly good at it, with Super Bowl ads often being the premiere examples.

German automaker Mercedes-Benz is once again the top advertiser in the luxury automotive game, according to research by advertising consultancy firm Ace Metrix released in November.

The automaker had an average Ace score of 599 out of 950, surpassing last year's score of 592 to stay ahead of runner-up Buick, which averaged 593. Successful advertising is necessary in positioning a brand, distinguishing product and of course informing consumers, but in a crowded market only the best ads will be remembered ([see story](#)).

Among the top performers was a BMW ad for its electronic car, which used humor to draw in the audience.

BMW compared its new electronic car to the creation of the Internet with a humorous commercial that aired during Super Bowl XLIX Feb. 1, 2015.

The brand released the video on YouTube along with outtake footage, a behind-the-scenes look and two short teasers. Katie Couric and Bryant Gumbel star in the ad, which recreated a clip of the two journalists discussing the

Internet on NBC's Today Show back in 1994 ([see story](#)).

"This is a great time to engage customers, fans and future buyers," Ms. Fix said. "These types of commercials take months to produce and the song choice was coincidental and everyone is playing Bowie music in his honor. I choose to look at it as a smart choice."

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