

TELEVISION

Maserati catapults entry-level pursuits with first commercial

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Italian automaker Maserati reinforced its dedication to the North American market during the Super Bowl with its first television commercial.

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The commercial promotes the Ghibli model, the brand's first under \$100,000 vehicle, evincing a movement toward inclusivity. Also, the commercial's cinematic nature featuring actress Quvenzhane Wallis aligned with the brand's image during an occasion that often has less to do with reputation building than with conversation shaping.

"I think that the spot was well produced, it looked great," said Cory Isaacson, cofounder of [Walton Isaacson](#), Chicago. "I was a little shocked that they used kids and also this blue collar, steel, factory tonality and characteristics of hard work to sell such an expensive car to a Super Bowl crowd who probably can't purchase.

"I think that people thought, I understand grit, I understand hard work, I just saw the bob Dylan ad, I get it, and then they see this very fancy car that is unaffordable," he said. "To me it was a little bit of a punking."

Mr. Isaacson is not affiliated with Maserati, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

[Maserati](#) was unable to comment directly. [Wieden+Kennedy](#) worked with the automaker

to create the spot.

Striking giants

The 90-second spot is titled "Strike" and appeared during the first quarter of the Super Bowl. U.S. director David Gordon Green directed the commercial in Los Angeles.

Unlike other luxury automakers such as **Jaguar and Audi**, Maserati withheld its commercial until game day, and likely surprised many consumers who have never seen a Maserati commercial.

The commercial begins with scenes of nature's might: an enormous wave crashing, a tornado closing in on a solitary house, a shadow engulfing a rock face, a raging fire.



Video still from Strike

Ms. Wallis, known for her lead role as "Hushpuppy" in the film "Beasts of the Southern Wild," narrates a poem about the courage one needs to stand up to giants. "Beasts of the Southern Wild" is based on overcoming the real and fictional giants that the mind apprehends.

By adopting the film's primary theme, Maserati tries to align itself with Hushpuppy's mission. A comparatively small and ultra-exclusive automaker alongside the Super Bowl's regular lineup, the commercial may seem apt.

Ms. Wallis continues to narrate as she purposefully goes to school in a charged atmosphere.



Video still from Strike

Soon, the commercial alternates between Ms. Wallis and workers of various professions working hard.



Video still from Strike

Up to this point in the spot it is unclear what product is being pitched.

Finally, Ms. Wallis says, "We wait until they get sleepy,/ wait until they get so big they can barely move,/ and then walk out of the shadows,/ quietly walk out of the dark—and strike," and a Maserati Ghibli emerges to roar down an open lane.



Maserati Ghibli

The message of the commercial seems clear. Maserati, a brand with a traditionally narrow scope, is poising itself to contend with bigger auto brands by making a model that is more affordable.

Embedded Video: [//www.youtube.com/embed/KmpiwU50f5w](https://www.youtube.com/embed/KmpiwU50f5w)

Strike

Maserati believes that the commercial is "relevant to Americans everywhere who have had struggles and obstacles to overcome."

"Strategically and creatively it was an interesting gamble by focusing on the emotional side and coming in with a 70k car, trying to reach the mass audience, even though 70k is still a lot of money for 99 percent of American consumers," said Miguel Garcia Castillo, group creative director at Walton Isaacson, Chicago.

"The quality was very high," he said. "You wouldn't expect anything less from a company like Maserati."

"At the end, I was a little put off by how much they leaned on the movie reference of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. "I thought it was a little bit of an over-promise to go in that direction."

Searches for the Maserati Ghibli increased 4,250 percent on Kelly Blue Book during the Super Bowl and the brand itself saw a 700 percent increase in searches on the Web site.

Both of these increases surpassed all other automakers that advertised during the game, according to Kelly Blue Book.

New direction

Maserati has dedicated the past few months to promoting its Ghibli model.

The automaker launched its Ghibli model at the Los Angeles Auto Show with a new campaign that aims to disrupt the entry-level luxury automotive market.

The “Absolute Opposite of Ordinary” campaign revolves around the theme that Maserati will never succumb to cookie-cutter designs, giving its vehicles an edge over others. By pricing the Ghibli model at the fringes of entry-level luxury automotive with a \$65,600 price tag, the brand is able to tap a much wider consumer-base without risking brand dilution ([see story](#)).

Beyond promoting individual models, the brand is also occupied with a much larger event.

Maserati began its 2014 centennial celebrations with a microsite that acquaints fans with the brand’s history.

A series of events and digital content will systematically emerge over the next year to keep the celebratory mood alive. Centennial celebrations not only induct brands into hallowed territory, but they allow for widespread transformations to occur ([see story](#)).

"The Super Bowl is a good forum for most brands and especially if you’re trying a new launch," Mr. Castillo said.

"It’s a far-fetched proposition to have one ad or one campaign can change people’s minds perceptions about a car that has been known as a luxury expensive car," he said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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