



The controversial, but no longer perfect, billboard, on Bourke Street, Darlington

The Perfect Billboard meets its match

ONE DAY. Maybe two. It was hard to imagine The Perfect Billboard lasting much longer than that. True, it was a perfect billboard. The art direction was perfect, the shot perfectly cropped to highlight a product. And the photography was as perfect as the Penthouse apricot flesh of the model.

No hair, no mole, no ugly bead of cellulite had escaped the skilful eye and hand of the retoucher who'd helped the photographer's work attain, if possible, an even greater degree of perfection.

Perfectly restrained typography added the final touch to this perfect piece of graphic communication.

Clearly impressed by all the work that had gone into its design back at the agency, the printer really did a top job transforming the small scale art work into the 24 large printed sheets it takes to cover your average billboard.

At the printing plant they probably told the bloke in charge that he'd done a wonderful job matching the skin tones. *Bloody perfect, mate.*

Why, even the man in overalls with ladder and paste made an extra special effort to hang The Perfect Billboard perfectly, getting all the edges of each of the 24 sheets nicely butted together. Some jobs are worth a little effort and this clearly was one of them.

His colleagues, back at the glue factory, probably complimented him too on a perfect job of paper hanging.

But The Perfect Billboard, perfectly



conceived, perfectly executed, and perfectly hung had, in truth, two minor imperfections. Its site and its subject.

It was hung at the corner of Bourke and Burton Streets in Darlington.

Now this is the corner where the poster for Southern Comfort with its slogan **IT TASTES LIKE UMMMM...** underwent almost daily transmutations.

IT TASTES LIKE BUMMMM... IT TASTES LIKE SPUTUMMMM... and IT TASTES LIKE SUMMMMP OIL... were but three of the more printable variations achieved by the **BUGA UP** people.

Each day the previous night's alterations would be pasted over and the following morning a new treatment would appear. It was a battle between the persistence of the poster company and the imagination of the graffitiists. Naturally, the latter group triumphed.

It's a costly business rearranging 24-sheet posters everyday.

So The Perfect Billboard was not exactly ideally sited.

Nor was the subject the kind that **BUGA UP** takes kindly to for the products featured on The Perfect Billboard was a pair skimpy black lace ladies knickers.

"This", I thought as I spied it, freshly hung, on my way to work one morning, "is not long for this world".

Mentally I gave it a day or two and presto, when I passed by two days later the graffitiists had done their worst. A lengthy message had been sprayed over the entire surface. A green light was with me so I didn't get a chance to check the text but another Perfect Billboard on a hoarding on Moore Park Road on the periphery of the Sports Ground carried an appropriate message. Something about this kind of advertising degrading women.

Two days later both posters had been covered with somewhat less perfectly hung black and white paper, no doubt while the agency and the poster people decided whether to risk further exposure or to make dramatic changes to the media schedule.

Hard on the heels of this direct action, **BUGA UP** wrote to the advertising trade publications a pretty stiff and articulate letter decrying "the schoolboy mentality" behind the ads.

Soon afterwards I happened to pick another advertising trade publication featuring winning designs for billboards in the UK.

These were nothing short of sensational.

Original, witty winning examples of ultra-soft sell that would bring a smile to the face of all but the dourest passers by and would in the main make even **BUGA UP** people think seriously about putting away their spray paint cans for a while.

Billboards are not essentially horrible things. In some urban contexts they can be lightening and brightening affairs, cheering up the odd dingy corners of a city. They shouldn't be allowed anywhere in the country but in places like White Bay. They are an integral part of the late 20th century industrial landscape.

The problem is not with the billboards but with the messages.

Now if the copy writers could display as much wit and inventiveness in devising their slogans as the **BUGA UP** folks do in spoofing them the graffitiists might just be able to sit at home at nights with a good book instead of braving inclement weather and the fuzz on their secret missions.

Take The Perfect Billboard for example.

Under the obliterating white sheets I just managed to make out the message that **BUGA UP** had contrived to fit the image of a giant female crotch in lace panties.

It ran "**AT LAST FRANKIE GOES TO WARRIEWOOD**".