

BMW NA 50th Anniversary | 50 Stories for 50 Years

Chapter 6: "The Ultimate Ad Slogan: BMW becomes the Ultimate Driving Machine"

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Road & Track ad June 1975

What makes a great ad slogan?

It should be catchy, for one thing. Think: “Just Do It,” “Where’s the beef?” or “A Diamond is Forever.” It should also describe the product being advertised, in a way that makes it irresistible to potential buyers.

Of all the ad slogans ever created, one stands out for meeting those criteria perfectly: “The Ultimate Driving Machine,” coined by Martin Puris for BMW in 1974.

At the time, BMW was in the midst of legal maneuvers designed to extricate the company from its longstanding distribution contract with Max Hoffman. Board member for sales Bob Lutz had been leading the effort, recognizing that BMW was losing considerable profits through independent distribution deals as well as the opportunity to define the brand to its customers.

“You can’t define the brand if you have individual distributors and individual companies making up their own minds how to advertise, how to position the car and so forth,” Lutz said. “They all had different advertising agencies and the vehicles were all positioned differently, even in Europe. But despite the quasi-ineptness of some of the dealers in how they positioned the cars, the brand for some reason was so strong. I attribute that to the love all over the world for BMW in the car magazines, which kind of overrode all the marketing efforts on the part of the individual distributors.”

The ads weren't bad, but Lutz deemed it essential to create a clear identity for the brand when BMW of North America took over from Hoffman. "The launching of BMW of North America was going to be essentially a marketing job while we transitioned out of Hoffman," Lutz said.

He put the account up for review, and soon narrowed the search to three US agencies. A pair of large, well-established agencies, Ted Bates and Benton & Bowles, made the cut, as did a new firm, Ammirati, Puris, AvRutnick—Ammirati & Puris after one of its founding partners left in 1977—that had recently spun off from the giant Young & Rubicam agency. "BMW did it the right way," said agency founder Martin Puris in 2013. "They gave each agency a fair amount of money to develop the pitch, full access to any executive in the company and three months to present an idea and some executions."

In Munich, Ammirati & Puris presented their proposal to Lutz, BMW of North America's then-CEO John Plant (who'd cede that post to John Cook once Hoffman was deposed, becoming BMW NA's first marketing director instead), and other BMW executives. The first ad presented was a daily print ad, which introduced a new tagline written by Puris that dubbed BMW "The Ultimate Driving Machine."

"They loved it!" Puris said. "I think we were the only agency that understood the car BMW built."

**TRULY GREAT
HIGH-PERFORMANCE
CARS CANNOT BE BUILT
IN A LABORATORY.**

BMW engineers long ago set as their goal the elusive quality of automotive perfection.

The optimum refinement of machine so that it functions reliably, performs extraordinarily and works in smooth, perfect union with the driver.

Nowhere else but in racing are such performance qualities as crucial.

And nowhere else are they as possible to achieve.

From the non-competitive vacuum of the laboratory and test track come cars that are predictably non-competitive.

On the race track, nothing is held back.

Victory flatly demands uncompromising engineering perfection and ingenuity—regardless of the degree of technical difficulty or the constraints of time or cost.

No manufacturer has a more impressive track record of victory on the great race circuits of the world than the Bavarian Motor Works.

And the effect of this racing heritage is not surprising.

As an evolutionary machine, each BMW success on the track has built a platform for the next BMW success on the road.

And so tangible are the results that the editors of Motor Trend magazine write that "...once a knowledgeable and experienced driver has driven a BMW, any BMW, nothing else feels quite as good as it did before."

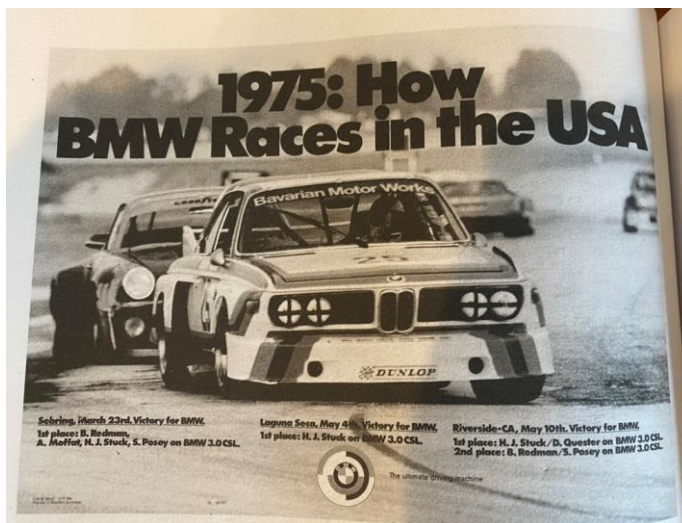
Now, if the thought of owning such a car intrigues you, we suggest you phone your BMW dealer and arrange a thorough test drive.

THE ULTIMATE DRIVING MACHINE.

© 1977 BMW of North America, Inc. For the name of the nearest BMW dealer or for further information, call us anytime, toll-free, at 800-243-6000 (Carn. 1-800-862-6500).

Road & Track June ad 1977

What the firm understood, primarily, was that BMW's premium position derived from performance rather than traditional notions of luxury. "It's the only thing that makes an expensive car worth the money," Puris said, "and that was the story we presented to them in the Ultimate Driving Machine. We never said luxury car. The question [to the customer] is, How do you want to spend your money? Is it on leather and burled walnut? Or do you want to spend it on performance? The line itself selects its market."



1975 season ad featuring the 3.0 CSL

BMW of North America's ability to advertise its cars was restricted while Hoffman remained the official US importer, and it relied on BMW Motorsport to publicize the brand in the US until a settlement was finalized on March 14, 1975. On March 21, the team took its first victory at Sebring, and BMW NA celebrated with win ads

featuring the Ultimate Driving Machine tagline. The ads made a bold statement, one that was backed up by the performance of BMW's road cars. "BMW put a race engine in a family car, which nobody had ever done before," Puris said.

As the years went by, the agency's relationship with BMW only deepened, Puris said. "We got to know the people who created the brand, and it gave us a genetic view of where the car came from and what it is today. The body has changed. The technology has changed, but it is still the car designed and engineered by people who love performance."

Puris's tagline had captured the essence of BMW, but the true measure

of an ad campaign's success can be quantified in sales, however, and in that respect also the Ultimate Driving Machine was a hit: From 15,007 cars in 1974, BMW's US sales rose to 19,419 cars in 1975, and to 26,040 in 1976. A decade later, BMW would sell nearly 100,000 cars in this market.

"The Ammirati & Puris ads helped tremendously," said BMW of North America's then-public relations manager Tom McGurn. "At the beginning, we were trying to distinguish ourselves, and their work was brilliant. Their ads compared being involved with driving in a BMW versus going down the road on a sofa—really spot-on. The ads built brand awareness, and they differentiated BMW from competitors like Mercedes, Volvo, Jaguar, and Audi."

In 1992, BMW of North America put its advertising account up for review, and the Ammirati & Puris declined to submit a new proposal even though the account was worth some \$70 million per year. BMW NA has engaged a series of firms since then, but the Ultimate Driving Machine has been a near-constant presence in BMW's advertising. That's been no surprise to Martin Puris, who knew the phrase would prove unusually durable. "As long as they kept building the same cars, as long as they followed the same concept of what a BMW was and is, as long as they pursued the story of extraordinary performance... If they produce true BMWs, they can use the line forever."

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