

Su Wilcox



This image was the first billboard in a series from Manchester, England's Love Your Bike campaign, which encourages residents to choose cycling over driving. It ran on traditional billboards and also on the "rolling billboards" on the back of buses, and was later a part of a postcard

campaign along with the other advertising images. The campaign was aimed at able-bodied motorists, especially overweight motorists, who could choose cycling over driving. (Car ownership and obesity are both lower per capita in the UK as compared to the US, but both are on the rise.)

The cyclist in the image is blurred, giving the appearance of movement and freedom, while the car is still, which adds to the cyclist being in the "fast lane" while the car is not. It brings up exhilaration from zooming along, probably invoking childhood nostalgia of days when cycling was purely for fun. The specially-designed, brightly-colored bike lane has a lot more visual interest, and more fun, than the boring black tarmac next to it. For those who already cycle (and aren't the target of the ad), it would give a feeling of reinforcement; they are already in the know about the fast lane and might feel pity for (or superiority to) the poor drivers who don't know what they are missing. Or, the current crowd of cyclists might disagree with the ad, thinking that they don't want a bunch of newbies crowding their bike paths, and as such could feel irritation or even anger that Manchester would want to take away the thing that makes them different from the motorists, especially since the movement and color around the cyclist give a sense of excitement and a desire to join him.

In contrast, the car is non-moving and boring. It's not in the fast lane; it's in the "fat lane." The driver who sees this would feel uneasy and guilty, especially if he has noticed any weight gain. A more sensitive motorist might also be angry at the implication that motorists are all fat. The car is the same boring color as the road; clearly, the driver of the car has a monotone life in which he merely drives to work and gains weight. The well-maintained, smooth "fast lane" also stands in direct contrast to the uneven, patched-up "fat lane." After a few moments' contemplation, frustration with the driving way of life will set in, especially when compared with the free-moving, life-enjoying cyclist next to him, although the city of Manchester does run the risk of alienating the more cynical motorists, who might decide the city cares more about bikes than cars. Since these ads were on the backs of buses in Manchester, it's entirely likely that a stuck-in-traffic motorist saw more than one cyclist whiz by, unencumbered by traffic woes, while the motorist was staring at this ad! If the motorist wasn't already envious of the carefree cycling lifestyle depicted in the image, the sight of a live, non-stuck cyclist ought to bring on the jealousy. This image was designed to make motorists unhappy with their current mode of transportation, by piling on the guilt and irritation while showing how much fun they could be having. Of course, "fat lane" is meant to be funny; the ones who are laughing will be current cyclists.

Commented [d1]: Nice description of context

Commented [d2]: good

Commented [d3]: ?

Commented [d4]: nice

Commented [d5]: good

Commented [d6]: good

Commented [d7]: envy or emulation? Does the motorist envy the cyclist or want to be like the cyclist? The ad clearly hopes for the latter.

Commented [d8]: Ha! Good. Yes.

The desired behavior from this ad is that the motorist would put the car in the garage and leave it there, opting for a bike instead. The point of the campaign wasn't to sell bikes; it was to encourage residents to use them, for health reasons, for transportation, or for recreation. The image stirs the desire to fight the middle-age spread by leaving the car at home, to reclaim some fun from a humdrum life by cycling instead of driving, and to be released from traffic by using the bright bike lane.

In order to feel this way, the motorist must believe that cycling is fun—again, any childhood joys involving cycling would make the campaign even more effective. The viewer must have bought into the tie between a sedentary lifestyle and weight gain, and also believe that exercise will help combat the weight problem. The viewer who felt guilty about being in the "fat lane" is the one who will be swayed most by this belief; here, the campaign is really pushing for a "Time to get out of the fat lane" response. Any irritation at prevailing traffic conditions would help either message-- that cycling is fun and good for your health--come across more strongly. A motorist who is already uneasy about weight gain, bored with the sameness of life, and/or dissatisfied with traffic conditions would be the one most likely to respond favorably to this ad.

Commented [d9]: Fine analysis

Since this ad is aimed at motorists, it's safe to say the Love Your Bike campaign is after the wealthier segment of the population—those able to afford cars *and* bicycles. Anyone in a position to choose between modes of transportation is the main target of the ad, especially anyone who struggles with being overweight or wants a healthier lifestyle. On the other hand, a side group—those who own bicycles, but rely on public transportation or walking—might also be pulled in by the excitement generated by the blurred cyclist, while chuckling at (or ignoring!) the car in the fat lane, since they don't drive.

Su,

This is a very fine analysis of a great image. You've described the context and the pathemata, along with the emotions they provoke, and you've analyzed the potential audiences. Your analysis is well-written, insightful, and thorough. Congratulations.

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