

The Supporting Actor Wore Radials

Stuart Elliott



"Soccer Mom" will feature a Dodge Caravan along with, from left, Ellery and Dylan Sprayberry, Missi Pyle and Robert Cavanah.

THE stars are coming out in movies scheduled for release later this year: Angelina Jolie in "Wanted," Harrison Ford in "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," Christian Bale as Batman in "The Dark Knight," the Dodge Caravan in "Soccer Mom." ...

Back up a minute. A minivan among the shimmering, glowing stars in the cinema firmament, to quote Lina Lamont in "Singin' in the Rain"? Indeed.

The movie "Soccer Mom," due in September, will feature the 2008 Dodge Caravan in various scenes as a result of an agreement involving the Dodge division of Chrysler; its media agency, PHD, part of the Omnicom Group; the Meredith Corporation, the publisher of magazines like Ladies' Home Journal; and Bogner Entertainment, the producer of the film.

Plans call for "Soccer Mom" to be released on DVD and shown on a Starz pay-cable television channel. There may be a limited theatrical release as well as screenings around the country, sponsored by Ladies' Home Journal.

"Soccer Mom" may be just the beginning. Executives at the magazine and Bogner Entertainment are discussing a series of "Mom" movies, which would all be titled with the phrase "Ladies' Home Journal Presents" and feature some of its advertisers.

The agreement is an example of a trend known as branded entertainment, which is reshaping how advertisers and media companies present themselves and their assets to customers, readers and viewers.

Integrating a brand or product into the plot of a movie, a TV series or a video game is intended to thwart the increasing ability of consumers to zap, zip through or otherwise dodge — so to speak — traditional advertising tactics like television commercials.

Some major movies are also taking part in the branded-entertainment trend. The Pond's line of products sold by Unilever is being billed in ads as the "exclusive skin care sponsor" of "Mamma Mia! The Movie," due in July from Universal Studios.

Another Unilever brand, Dove, has been described in news reports as an investor in "The Women," a movie planned for release in October that is a remake of the 1939 film of the same name.

"This is a neat way we can target the consumer we want to speak to," said Mike Accavitti, director for marketing of the Dodge brand and the SRT performance line of cars at Chrysler.

"The beauty of this practice is that it allows the consumer to see the Dodge Caravan in everyday life, as they'd use it," Mr. Accavitti said, and showcases "the benefits, the features, that we'd love the consumer to see."

The minivan is getting "a great supporting role" in "Soccer Mom," he added, "one that's credible."

As for Ladies' Home Journal, said Julie Pinkwater, vice president and publisher in New York, the sponsorship is "a great brand extension, a great way of extending our reach" to current and potential readers and subscribers.

It also meant, she added, that advertisers in the magazine could be offered "the opportunity to integrate" products and brands into the script of the film as the screenwriter, Frederick Ayeroff, wrote it.

"This is a perfect integration: 'Soccer Mom' and a minivan," Ms. Pinkwater said, referring to the archetype of a parent driving her sports-minded offspring around suburban America in just such a vehicle.

"The way it's shown," she added, "it's seamless."

That touches on a challenge for all branded-entertainment projects: the sponsors' products need to be part of the plot but must not be perceived by moviegoers or TV viewers as intruders.

A particularly egregious example was the 1995 film "Bye Bye, Love," in which three divorced fathers met at a McDonald's restaurant each weekend to pick up their children from their ex-wives. In most reviews of the movie, the critics complained that McDonald's was on screen almost as often as, if not more than, the main characters.

"Yes, Ladies' Home Journal is presenting and Dodge has a major role in the film," said Fritz Weiss, director for marketing and promotions at Bogner Entertainment in Los Angeles, "but we're producing a story the Ladies' Home Journal consumer will want to watch."

To that end, he added, "we are organically integrating the Dodge Caravan" into the plot rather than being so obvious that viewers would liken their experience "to having to watch a commercial."

"There's a balance you have to reach," Mr. Weiss said, where the product or brand inclusions still "make sense for the story."

"You don't want to hear a character say, 'I'm going to get a Big Mac' and another ask, 'Will you get me some of those wonderful fries?' " he added.

Mr. Accavitti of Chrysler echoed that perspective.

"It's believable this family would be driving a Dodge minivan," he said, but making the movie resemble an infomercial "is not good for anybody."

So while the characters in "Soccer Mom" may be seen using a new feature of the Caravan called Swivel and Go seating, Mr. Accavitti said, "it's not over the top, it's not, 'Look at this great Swivel and Go feature with stain-resistant fabric on the seats.' "

Bogner, Dodge and Ladies' Home Journal hope to sell about 500,000 DVDs of "Soccer Mom," which will be priced at about \$19. The movie features Missi Pyle (of "Dodgeball" and "Galaxy Quest") as the title soccer mom, who disguises herself as an Italian coach hired by the team on which her teenage daughter (Emily Osment of "Hannah Montana") plays.

The cast also includes Dan Cortese (of "My Dad Is Better Than Your Dad") as a soccer coach, and comic complications ensue. Mr. Weiss described the movie as "She's the Man" (Amanda Bynes, disguised as her soccer-playing brother) meets "Mrs. Doubtfire" (Robin Williams, disguised as a nanny).

Originally, Ms. Pinkwater said, a food company that also advertises in Ladies' Home Journal was to be written into the script along with Dodge, but the company withdrew because of problems that the involvement could be construed as "marketing to children."

"There was a lesson learned," she added.

Ms. Pinkwater and Mr. Accavitti said it was difficult to estimate a dollar value for the Dodge role in the movie because the deal was partly "added value," a publishing term for perks earned by a large and frequent advertiser, and partly additional money.

As for the next films in the series that Ms. Pinkwater and Mr. Weiss hope to make after "Soccer Mom," she listed some ideas as including "Doctor Mom" and "President Mom."

Hmmmm. Let's see. For the latter, perhaps a woman who is, say, a former first lady, becomes president after her daughter, who has long shied from the spotlight, begins to campaign for her.

Nah. Who would believe it?

Disponível em: <<http://www.nytimes.com>>. Acesso em 26/3/2008.