

## Steve Henry

Life's too short to read body copy. Let's face it — life's too short to read this book. Skim it. Look at the pictures. Nobody reads body copy.

Sometimes, I have this fantasy that a piece of copy goes out. And it hasn't been read by anybody — not even by the proof-reader. And, hidden down in paragraph 13, is a typo that reveals the secret of the universe. But nobody gets to see it. (Because nobody reads body copy.)

Actually, increasingly, people don't read ads at all. They read — content. People don't look at ads, or judge ads, or consider ads. They consume — content.

Ads are things they avoid.

Working in the ad industry, you think people are interested in ads. But they're not.

Go home at Christmas, and talk to your relatives, and see how much they know about what you do.

Then divide that by 50, to give you a picture of how strangers feel about your latest campaign.

Ads are like wasps at the picnic. They get in the way of what people want.

Or they're like the loony on the bus. "Thinking of buying some dog food?" Er, no. I don't have a dog.

People consume content, not ads. So you have to make content, not ads. You have to entertain. And words can still play an important part in that.

So my advice on writing body copy is — don't bother. My advice on writing content that is paid for by your clients is two-fold.

One, always be entertaining. Clients should be thinking, not "what ads do I want to make?" But "what ads would I like to see?"

Two, do it differently. The most important thing about any commercial communication is to do it differently. Write it upside down, in Jamaican patois, or with every fifth letter missing.

Having said all this, I went to dig out some examples of body copy from the plan chest and immediately realised that I hadn't been quite as revolutionary as I wanted to be.

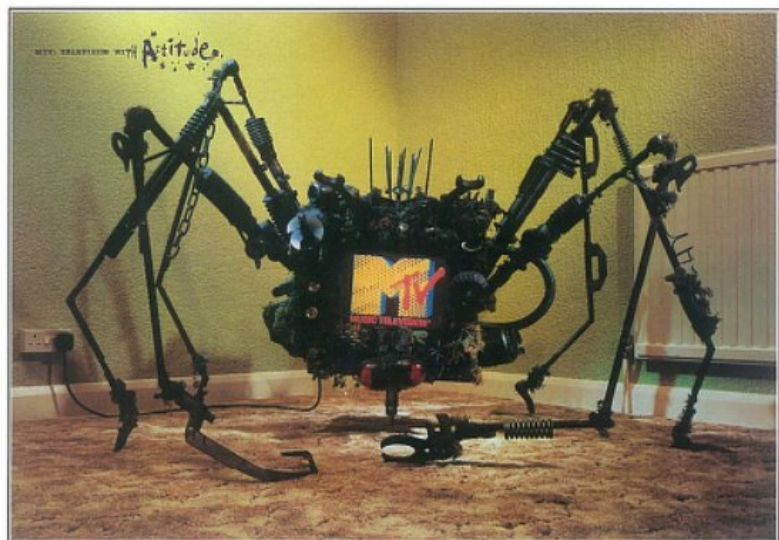
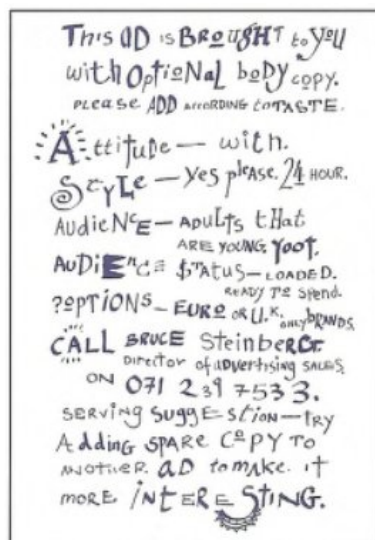
My first, panicky thought was to send in ads with as few words on them as possible — like the old *Time Out* poster with a candle burning at both ends, or the First Direct poster with a deliberately bland shot of rather stubby grass stretching across 96 sheets of prime London poster-site.

Then I thought, grow up, mate. This book is about words, and you don't despise words that much, do you?

Because let me confess something right now. Although I fully understand the futility of writing body copy, I really like doing it.

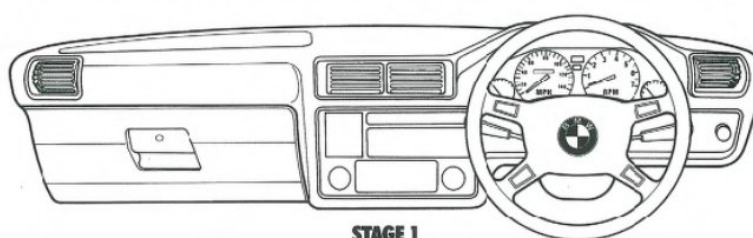
So I dug out some ads with words on them. And I hit another problem. As a creative director, you don't always get to write the ads you most want to. So some of these ads aren't my body copy at all.

MTV. This was an MTV trade ad in which we introduced the idea of "optional body copy". The copy was put on a rubdown inserted into the magazine. You could add as much of it (or as little) as you wanted to by rubbing on the sheet like a transfer. This came from a team called Justin Hooper (copywriter) and Christian Cotterill (art director).

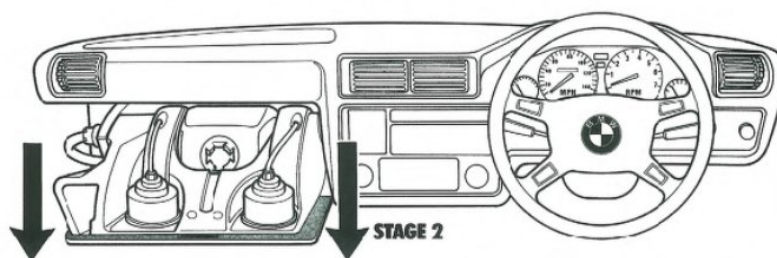


A BMW April Fool's ad from wcrs. I like this because I had to write to a style set by Robin Wight, but I was able to inject some of my own sense of humour into it.

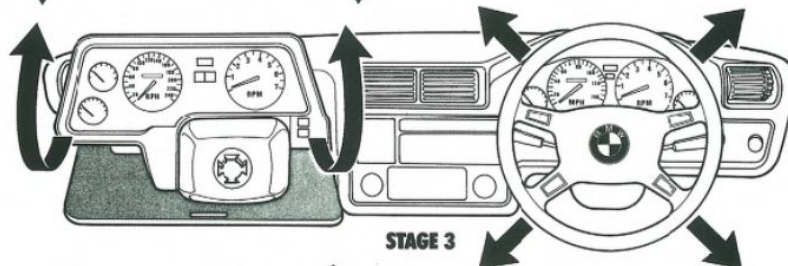
## WHEN YOU CROSS THE CHANNEL, OUR STEERING WHEEL CROSSES OVER WITH YOU.



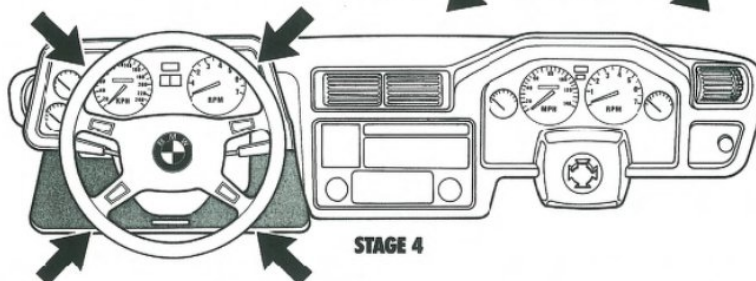
STAGE 1



STAGE 2



STAGE 3



STAGE 4

Since the 'Droit de Seigneur' act, passed in 1867, the French have always driven on the right-hand side of the road.

This is not merely a matter of inconvenience for British drivers; it is also a potential safety hazard. And yet car manufacturers have been ignoring the problem completely.

With one notable exception. Because BMW engineer Aap Riffuhl discovered, just three years ago, that the problem could be tackled; and, with ingenious modifications, a test vehicle was designed that incorporated a unique BMW feature – the multi-dashboard facility.

By incorporating a second-unit steering wheel socket and instrument panel into a conventional

glove compartment, Dr Riffuhl was able to provide the basis for a secondary driving position.

The fascia, naturally enough, conforms to 'Continental' standards – with a kph speedometer, and the 'Lawson' fuel gauge reading in litres.

Then, by the insertion of a lynch-pin into the steering wheel column, fellow engineer Hans Grabbern was able to devise the first quick-release steering wheel. (Incorporated, too, into the column is a secondary 'Continental' horn – the 'Vorin-Drivers' 80 decibel air-horn.)

The final problem, of the foot-pedals, was easily resolved; Herr Grabbern made them transferable, too, with a dual position facility.

At present, this option is only available on the

BMW 3 Series but it is expected to be available on all models in time for the proposed opening of the Channel tunnel.

And then, for the first time, British drivers will be able to drive abroad without getting on the wrong side of the natives.

To Use Again: Epaint Ltd, Elmfield Avenue, Stockport, Cheshire, SK22 4TA.

Please send me more details of the BMW multi-dashboard facility.

I intend to drive abroad: ☐ for business, ☐ for pleasure, ☐ for ever.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE ULTIMATE DRIVING MACHINE**





Idris Soft Drinks. A chance to indulge — which I feel I only half-took. Undoubtedly this is the sort of ad which David Abbott would have written much better.

## REMEMBER...

THAT TIME AFTER SCHOOL, in the summer, when you could go outside and play till ten o'clock at night? ¶ THAT LONG DRIVE to the seaside, when you



first saw the blue of the sea through a gap in the hills? ¶ PUTTING UP A TENT in the garden, and drinking Lemonade made cloudy by the real lemons in it, as the sun shone through the canvas? ¶ GETTING

OFF THE BUS a stop

early, so you could spend the fare money you saved on sweets? ¶ PLAYING 'TAG' in the garden all afternoon, as the shadows lengthened across the lawn? ¶ GOING FOR A LONG WALK, just with



your best friend, and giving yourself a reward in the sweet shop a mile away from home? ¶ MAKING AN ICE CREAM float, with vanilla ice cream and Cream Soda, and taking it carefully outside



with your two favourite comics? ¶ PICKING WILD BLACKBERRIES, and thinking you could run away and survive for ever on the delicious, free fruit? ¶ ROLLING DOWN A long bank, and standing up and feeling all dizzy as you ran

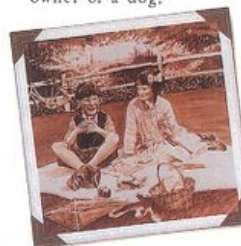
up the bank to do it again? ¶ THE TASTE OF Dandelion and Burdock (if you ever drank it, how could you ever forget it)? ¶ PLAYING CATCH AGAINST a wall, and giving yourself a target of 10 in a row, to help England win the match?



¶ COMING HOME ONE DAY, to find that your family was the proud owner of a dog,

and you had to think of a name for it?

¶ TRYING GINGER BEER, made with real ginger, because your father said it was a great drink, and finding out he was right?



**IDRIS**  
TRADITIONALS

Thames TV. I love the way the copy is spread out around the page, so you avoid that normal block-wedge look of body copy. The ad was a lot of fun to write.

**THE WORST THINGS AN ADVERTISING AGENCY CAN SAY TO ITS CLIENTS.**

1. "Great news. We've merged."

13. "Sorry. Looks like we can't afford London on the schedule."


12. "I know we've made a hash of your advertising for the last 10 years. But we'll really try hard from now on."

11. "Blimey. Did we do that?"

10. "You'll notice we've left your sales conference off the timing plan."

9. "Here's the finished film. I guarantee that people will be able to make sense of it in research."

8. "Yea, yea. But clients don't know much about advertising, do they?"



2. "Meeting...what meeting?"

3. "You know what's causing the problem here. Your logo's too big."


4. "Can I give you a lift to the station? My Ferrari's just outside."

5. "Here, this'll make you laugh. We've gone a bit over budget."

6. "Sorry about the punch-up in reception."

7. "Hello. I recognise you from somewhere don't I?"

**YOU CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO ADVERTISE IN LONDON. YOU CAN AFFORD TO ADVERTISE ON THAMES.**

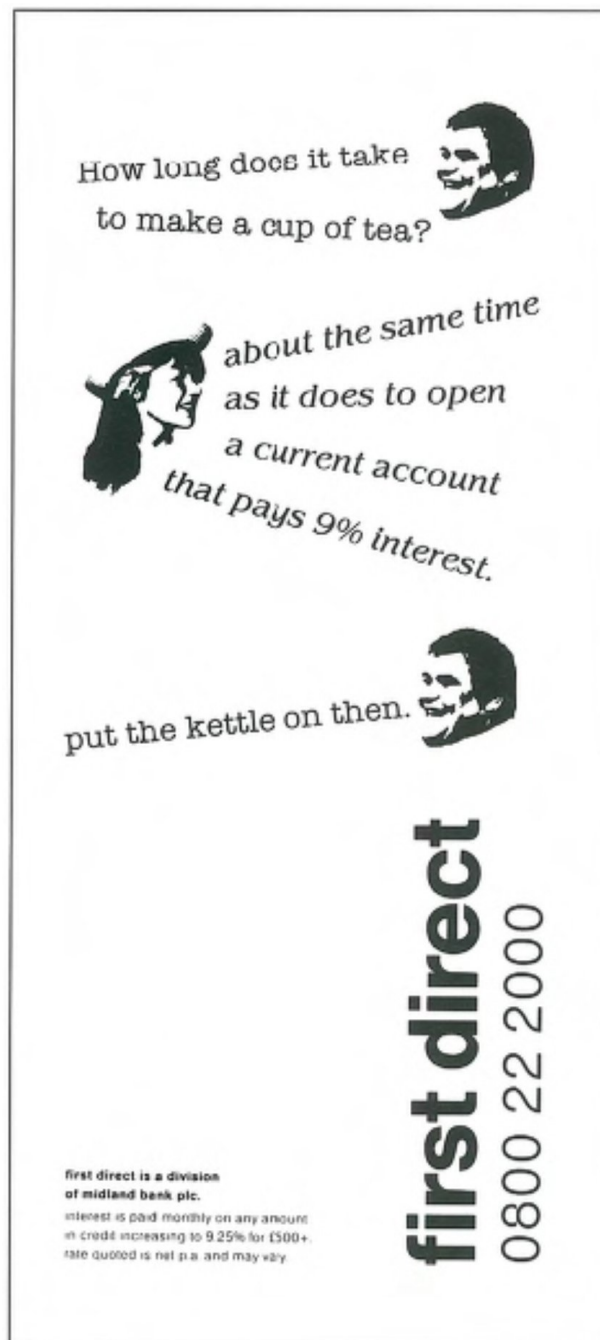


THAMES  
TELEVISION  
XXI

(CAMPAIGNS FROM £75,000. SPOTS FROM £500. EVEN LESS FOR LOCAL ADVERTISERS).

First Direct. In this campaign, small cut-out heads enjoyed short dialogues in small-space press ads. They had the feel of cartoons (i.e. they looked approachable), but I felt they were very fresh and different.

Most of the ads in the campaign were written by other people (Naresh Ramchandani, Dave Buonaguidi and Steve Girdlestone). I can't remember who wrote this one.

A vertical advertisement for First Direct. It features three cut-out heads of people in a conversation. The first head asks, 'How long does it take to make a cup of tea?'. The second head replies, 'about the same time as it does to open a current account that pays 9% interest.' The third head says, 'put the kettle on then.' At the bottom, the text 'first direct' is written vertically in a bold, sans-serif font, followed by the phone number '0800 22 2000'. Small text at the bottom left provides details about the bank and interest rates.

How long does it take  
to make a cup of tea?

about the same time  
as it does to open  
a current account  
that pays 9% interest.

put the kettle on then.

**first direct**  
0800 22 2000

first direct is a division  
of midland bank plc.  
interest is paid monthly on any amount  
in credit increasing to 9.25% for £500+.  
rate quoted is net p.a. and may vary.

Call me perverse if you want to, but I like body copy that doesn't look like body copy. Which isn't that surprising when you consider that I first learnt about advertising from a man who took a very individual approach to copywriting.

Fresh from studying English Literature at Oxford University, I was told by Dave Trott that the best bit of body copy he'd ever seen was on a Land Rover ad from tbwa. I looked at it and there were actually no words on it at all. Just symbols.

He was right.

Now the question you've got to ask yourself is this. What's the next bit of genuinely revolutionary body copy going to look like? Not like anything in this book, that's for sure. Because these ideas have all been done before.

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*Steve Henry was founder and Creative Director of HHCL— the agency voted Campaign's Agency of the Year three times and Campaign's Agency of the Decade in January 2000. This unique award was given because of HHCL's "iconoclastic attitude both to the work and the way it does business".*

*Steve has won most of the major creative awards, including the D&AD Gold Pencil, the Grand Prix at Cannes, the Grand Prix at the British Television Awards, the President's Award at the Royal Television Society awards and the President's Award at Creative Circle (twice).*

*In 2008, Steve was one of the founding members of Campaign's Hall of Fame, a list of the 40 most influential people in British advertising over the last 50 years.*

*He currently works on a range of different projects, helping agencies all over the world. He also writes a regular blog on the Campaign website about creativity.*

*Outside of advertising, he has written three books—including the best-selling *Change the World for a Fiver* and a new book about life after the Recession, *You Are Really Rich, You Just Don't Know It Yet*.*

**The D&AD Copy Book is available for \$9.99 online from [TASCHEN](#) and the [iTunes store](#).**