

# ABAC

## ABAC COMPLAINTS PANEL – DETERMINATION NO: 06/04 Carlton Draught

### IN THE COMPLAINT OF MICHAEL SAAD

**Product: Carlton Draught**  
**Advertiser: Carlton & United Beverages**

Professor The Hon Michael Lavarch - Chief Adjudicator  
Ms Liz Dangar - Member  
Ms Jeanne Strachan - Member

**31 August 2004**

#### **Introduction**

1. By letter dated 11 July 2004, Mr Michael Saad forwarded a complaint to the Advertising Standards Board (“ASB”). The complaint is about a television advertisement for Carlton Draught beer. The ASB determined the complaint fell within the scope of the Advertisers’ Code of Ethics and would be determined by the ASB. The Chief Adjudicator of the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code Complaints Panel (“the Panel”) in accordance with the protocols applying to the scheme for alcohol advertising also determined the advertisement raised issues under the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (“ABAC”).

#### **Alcohol Advertising Pre-Vetting System (“AAPS”)**

2. The self-regulatory system for alcohol beverages advertising features independent examination of proposed advertisements against the ABAC prior to publication. The advertisement complained of was submitted to the AAPS for pre-vetting and approval for the advertisement was given (No. UL 1/04).

#### **The Advertisement**

3. The complaint is about a television commercial for Carlton Draught beer that features a satirical depiction of a well-dressed man carrying a canoe throughout his working day. According to Mr Saad the canoe is used in an allegedly dangerous manner, including hitting a female colleague in the back of the head, and breaking a clearance sign while exiting a car park.
4. The advertisement is a black and white television commercial, featuring a well-dressed and apparently successful man. He is portrayed as a person in a professional or business capacity. For instance, there is a scene with his personal assistant meeting him at his car with an umbrella to shelter him from rain. In another scene he is having lunch with another well-dressed professional business person, and he is also seen dictating notes to his personal assistant.
5. A male voiceover throughout the advertisement expresses the man’s importance in the early scenes with phrases such as: “to win”, “to do manly things”, “get on top and stay there”, “make the tough decisions”. The voiceover and visual scenes then suggest that

this man's success is due to his carrying a canoe. Other work colleagues are then shown carrying their canoes, and the voiceover says that to be successful you need to have the "biggest, strongest, longest canoe".

6. The numerous scenes where men are depicted carrying canoes includes a scene where, in a professional office setting, a man, apparently accidentally, hits a female work colleague in the back of the head, and another scene where the man is trying to enter an elevator carrying his canoe. There is also a scene where the man is driving a convertible sports car and exiting a car park with the canoe sitting upright in the back seat. The canoe hits the overhead "Minimum Clearance" sign, and is broken in two.
7. The commercial concludes with a voiceover telling the audience that carrying a canoe is awkward, so "ignore it all, with a cool, refreshing Carlton Draught". The advertisement ends with a visual message: "Carlton Draught – made from Beer".

### **The Complaint**

8. Mr Saad argues that the advertisement depicts examples of dangerous behaviour that could be replicated in real life. Mr Saad cites the scenes of a man carrying a canoe that hits a woman on the back of the head, and where the canoe is sitting in the back of a car that is driving through a car park boomgate. Mr Saad believes the advertisement is a dangerous depiction of the combination of alcohol, driving and drugs, causing personal injury and a motor vehicle accident.

### **The Code**

9. The ABAC contains 2 provisions which could arguably be raised by Mr Saad's complaint and the nature of the advertisement. The provisions provide that advertising for alcohol beverages must:
  - **Section (a)(iii)**  
Not promote offensive behaviour, or the excessive consumption, misuse or abuse of alcohol beverages;
  - **Section (d)**  
Not depict any direct association between the consumption of alcohol beverages... and the operation of a motor vehicle, boat or aircraft or the engagement in any sport (including swimming and water sports) or potentially hazardous activity.

### **Arguments in Favour of the Complaint**

10. In favour of the complaint it can be argued that the use of a canoe in a dangerous manner, inflicting personal injury and causing a motor vehicle accident in a car park is irresponsible and breaches the Code in two respects. Firstly, it might be said that the advertisement does not present a mature balanced and responsible approach to the consumption of alcohol beverages and therefore breaches Section (a) of the Code. Secondly, it might be said that the advertisement depicts dangerous driving techniques and the hazardous use of water sports equipment (the canoe) and therefore is in breach of Section (d) of the Code.

### **The Advertiser's Comments**

11. Carlton & United Beverages responded to the complaint by letter dated 26 August, 2004. Before responding directly to the issues raised in the complaint, the Advertiser set the context for the TVC. "Canoe" is the second instalment of a new advertising campaign for Carlton Draught which launched earlier in 2004. "Canoe" lampoons traditional masculine advertising by depicting a number of highflying executives going about their business in the workplace e.g. in meetings, high-fiving in corridors, negotiating business deals, etc. The punch line is delivered by way of a bizarre business accessory – "a long, strong canoe" which goes everywhere with the executives. The "Canoe" is a metaphor for office politics and corporate egotism. The proposition of the ad is that the characters, and by implication, the adult viewers of the TVC, would be better off if they ignored the politics and enjoyed a beer.
12. The Advertiser said that that creative treatment is based on humour, especially slapstick and the ridiculous. The Advertiser contends that the TVC is pure fantasy and was never intended to portray reality, merely extravagant exaggerations not likely to be regarded as fact.
13. In response to the question that Section (a) of the ABAC Code is breached by depicting an irresponsible promotion of alcohol through the "canoe" being seen to be a cause of an injury to a passer-by and the cause of a motor vehicle collision, the Advertiser states that they do not believe the ad depicts the irresponsible promotion of alcohol, nor does it depict the direct association of the beverage and the use of a motor vehicle involved in an incident.
14. In response to the question that Section (d) of the ABAC Code is breached by depicting a direct association between the beverage and the use of a motor vehicle, the Advertiser states that there is no alcohol consumption in the ad and there is absolutely no suggestion that alcohol has influenced the characters' behaviour. The Advertiser states that a pot of Carlton Draught only appears in the end frame of the TVC.
15. In conclusion, the Advertiser states that the response to the advertisement from consumers has been very positive and the humour and entertainment value have been enjoyed. The Advertiser quotes the preamble to the ABAC Code, "in terms of the advertisement's impact on a reasonable person within the class of persons to whom the advertisement is directed and other persons to whom the advertisement may be communicated" and states that this advertisement upholds both the ABAC Code and the AANA Code of Ethics.

### **The Panel's View**

16. Mr Saad is in essence taking the advertisement literally, and assuming that the behaviour which he views as irresponsible, is linked to the consumption of the product. The Panel does not believe this is a reasonable understanding of the advertisement, and in any event at no time is there a depiction of the consumption of the product prior to or associated with the so-called dangerous activity.
17. Rather, the advertisement is displaying a setting where male competition within the work place leads to particular behaviour. The advertisement expressly calls for office competition to be 'ignored' and for persons to consume the product instead. In this way, the consumption of the product is portrayed as an alternative to the competitive office environment which the advertisement satirises.
18. It is the Panel's view that the advertisement cannot be taken to breach the ABAC Code and accordingly the complaint is dismissed.