

Super Bowl Ad Recharges Love Of Detroit Automaking

Jeff Karoub and Mike Householder, Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — To a pulsating beat, hip-hop star Eminem drives a sleek Chrysler through the streets of Detroit, proudly cruising by the city's landmarks, towering skyscrapers and the hopeful faces of its people. His journey ends with an unapologetic message: "This is the Motor City, and this is what we do."

A day after it aired, one of the most-talked about Super Bowl ads from the football championship sent shivers of pride through the battered city, which hopes car buyers are willing to look past Chrysler's billion-dollar bailout and embrace the idea that if a vehicle is "Imported from Detroit," that's reason enough to buy it.

"It's like an anthem or rallying cry for Detroit," Aaron Morrison of Mason City, Iowa, told The Associated Press via Facebook. "It makes me want to buy my next car made in America."

Morrison, a photographer, said the ad even inspired him to consider moving to Detroit to work for Chrysler.

The two-minute ad was unusual for its length, airing during a broadcast in which a 30-second spot costs \$3 million. And it framed the gritty urban images, including vacant factories, with an attitude that embraced the city's past and its survival instinct.

"What does this city know about luxury, huh?" the narrator asks. "What does a town that's been to hell and back know about the finer things in life? Well, I'll tell you — more than most. You see, it's the hottest fires that make the hardest steel."

"Because when it comes to luxury, it's as much about where it's from as who it's for. Now, we're from America, but this isn't New York City or the Windy City or Sin City, and we're certainly no one's Emerald City."

The Chrysler ad was "the big story of the night," according to New Mexico Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey Co. that tracks online buzz. Consumers repeated the "Imported from Detroit" slogan in online comments, the company said.

For Chrysler, which emerged from bankruptcy in June 2009, right before General Motors, the commercial kicked off an advertising campaign that it hopes draws buyers back to showrooms and revives the brand.

"Detroit's ascendancy mirrors Eminem's own struggles and accomplishments," Chrysler brand CEO and President Olivier Francois said in an e-mail to the AP. "This is not simply yet another celebrity in a TV spot. It has meaning. Like his music and

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story, the new Chrysler is 'Imported from Detroit' with pride."

Of course, the tagline is not without some irony: Italian automaker Fiat Group SpA now owns 25 percent of Chrysler, and the ad was produced by Wieden + Kennedy, a Portland, Oregon-based agency known for its work with Nike. Chrysler switched after its previous advertising agency, a famous firm called BBDO, closed its Detroit office.

Still, Chrysler said, the entire commercial was shot in Detroit with a local cast and crew, and the voiceover work was done by Kevin Yon, who is from Michigan.

The out-of-state involvement did not bother Matt Clayson, 30, who is undertaking a Motor City turnaround of his own. In 2007, he and his wife bought a large but uninhabitable foreclosed home in Detroit's West Indian Village — a mix of stately older houses close to the Detroit River.

"It's interesting that it took an outside eye . . . to really kind of cut to some of the core basics of what is a city and what is a place," said Clayson, an attorney and director of the Detroit Creative Corridor, a nonprofit that aims to establish the city as a global center for creative innovation.

"They did something right, definitely. I'm not an expert, but I think they really summed up kind of where we've been and where we are as a city."

The stirring ad painted a picture that the outside world doesn't often see, said one retiree from suburban Detroit who was walking through downtown on Monday.

"It was very touching. It gave me goose bumps," said Mario Succurro, 64, from Plymouth. "People don't know the city of Detroit . . . And there's some problems over here, of course . . . Detroit is coming back. We're down because of autos, but it doesn't mean that we're dead."

While Fiat took over management of Chrysler, the automaker still owes around \$7 billion to the U.S. and Canadian governments from its 2009 bailout. It intends to pay that money back through an initial public offering of shares, which could come by the end of this year.

But the government-led bailout has been a sore point for some critics of the auto industry, and the commercial served to renew the debate.

Rep. Dennis Ross, a Florida Republican, tweeted, "Imported from Detroit" . . . "borrowed from China."

In an e-mail Monday, Ross' chief of staff, Fredrick Piccolo Jr., described his boss' Twitter post as a "tongue in cheek commentary on the irony of Chrysler touting its 'American made' ideal, with the reality that it survives because of money borrowed on the backs of the taxpayer, from China."

Ross "has consistently opposed the auto bailouts, TARP, and others, and would just

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stand by his past opposition to taxpayer-financed bailouts of any private industry," Piccolo said.

Ross is from Lakeland, Florida, longtime spring-training home of the Detroit Tigers. He's also a regular at preseason games and "knows there are many great things about Detroit, including automakers that did not take bailouts."

The real test of the ad will be whether it stirs consumers to reconsider Chrysler — and by extension the town that put the world on wheels.

"I think it is a defining moment for the auto industry. It really was good for all the carmakers," said Bob Kolt, an instructor at Michigan State University in the advertising, public relations and retailing department. Kolt and his colleagues have been tracking and rating Super Bowl ads for 14 years. The Chrysler ad drew high praise, although the top two rankings went to Volkswagen AG ads.

"Will it work? I don't know. We'll probably know soon," he said. "It really sort of tried to redefine Chrysler, and it did that effectively."

Brenda Harvill, 60, of Detroit, said the commercial gave her community "a new image as a comeback city."

"We were down for a while," she acknowledged. "But guess what? We're back."

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Associated Press Auto Writer Dee-Ann Durbin contributed to this report.

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