

Making the best of times

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."



Those words – the opening lines of the Charles Dickens novel *A Tale of Two Cities* seem – better than anything else I have heard – to sum up this strange pandemic.

The quote also applies to our advertising industry at the moment ... because it's largely put creativity into self-isolation and deluges us with clichés and platitudes. If I hear another "unprecedented" or whatever "in the time of corona", I'm going to turn on the hi-fi, aim the speakers at the neighbours and play *Ain't Gonna Bump No More (With No Big Fat Woman)* at full volume. Why? Because it is about as intelligent as some of the ads we are being bombarded with.

A brand which has always shown it is intelligent while still retaining that all-important "common touch" is Volkswagen, which has, together with its longtime agency, Ogilvy Cape Town, produced some of the most memorable and touching ads.

It was a series of their ads back in the '80s which saw me make the second-best decision of my life (after asking someone to marry me) ... to buy a new VW Jetta. Apart from being the ultimate reliable transport (340,000km and 26 years later I sold it – and it's still running around), the Jetta helped us make precious family memories with our road trips around this

beautiful country and its neighbours.

“ So, we saw cheetah cubs in Kruger National Park; whales rolling just beyond the breakers at Still Bay; dassies at Tsitsikamma; an Atlantic Ocean sunset at Swakopmund in Namibia and an Indian Ocean sunrise at Umhlanga; went paddle skiing in the Knysna Lagoon; camping in the Magaliesberg and bird-watching in the Vumba rain forest in Zimbabwe. ”

So, I will always associate road trips with VW ... and it is necessary for me to declare my bias here. Unsurprisingly, the latest VW ad struck a chord with me, because it's all about getting out and “driving local”.

But it's also an astute recognition from the German carmaker that the future of cars and travel may be different because of the ravages of the virus. People won't have the sort of money to lavish on expensive new cars. They also won't have the money to go overseas on holiday. At the same time, devastated businesses are trying to get going again after months of forced inactivity.

VW's message is: Drive Local. Support Local. That first part can be taken two ways: get out and drive, take roads trips around South Africa ... but it can also mean drive a locally made car, like VW's Polo, which is built in the company's Uitenhage factory outside Port Elizabeth.

At the end of the ad, there is a call to action, promising a payment holiday to those who may be cash-strapped at present.

But, the ad shows VW vehicles and members of the "VW family" (the owners and fans) getting out and about to support local business, too – and to play a role in helping to revive the battered economy.

It is the first of the major car brands to acknowledge that the future of transport will be different – and to also put its finger on the growing movement to support each other as we move out of the shadow of the Covid-19 disease.

Like most other VW ads, it makes you feel good, it gives you a sense of optimism and, in this case, a glimpse at what the past was and how we can eventually again do some of the things we did before.

Classic advertising. Classic VW. Classic Ogilvy. Well deserving of this week's Orchid.

ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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