



CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	307/09
2. Advertiser	Virgin Airlines
3. Product	Travel
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Discrimination or vilification Gender - section 2.1
6. Date of determination	Wednesday, 8 July 2009
7. DETERMINATION	Dismissed

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This TVC commences with a woman boarding a Virgin Airways V Australia plane, she is greeted by hostesses opening a bottle of sparkling wine, she is shown to her sky bed seat with three attendants catering to her needs. The woman is shown sleeping and then shown walking down the aisle of the plane. There are approximately 6 hostesses in the compartment. The woman is then shown seated next to Sir Richard Branson. She says "Wow, that was so much fun." He says to the woman "Just wait until we get it up." Both are seen to smirk at the comment as the overlay has the words "RICHARD BRANSON'S NEWEST AIRLINE NOW FLYING FROM AUSTRALIA TO LA". Ad ends with an airplane shown in the sky, with the V Australia logo.

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

I object to the advertisement because it depicts women in a subservient sexual fantasy role and uses a sexual comment relating to a male erection. Although the passenger that the stewards were pampering was female, the advertisement is clearly aimed at the male population and has little regard for the role and reputation of women.

Smutty and implying sexual acts to the general public.

Discrimination in all female, all skinny, all young models used is not appropriate at all. Not exactly humorous either?

I object to the end tagline delivered by Virgin boss, Richard Branson, "wait until you get it up".

I object to the blatant sexualisation in the ad, and the tagline that obviously relates to an erection. I object to the way the ad objectifies women for the benefit of a man, and I object to the stereotypes in relation to this. I recognise that it is delivered in a tongue in cheek manner, but I still find it on the whole objectionable. The tagline is sexual and blatant and i think misogynistic (the women are in stereotypical service roles, the man is the object of the 'service', then the tagline quite obviously relates to an erection.

This ad objectifies women, and treats them as sexual servers to airline patrons. The women's dancing was more in line with a strip club than a workplace.

The ad was sexually suggestive, noted by Branson's remark to an attractive woman that she should wait until "we get it up".

Such ads vilify women, encouraging males to objectify women. It continues advertising's long sexist tradition of using women's sexuality (and sexual appeal to males) to sell a product, in this case Virgin airline flights. Thus, the ad is sexist and demeaning to women.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complaint/s regarding this advertisement included the following:

We note that the Advertising Standards Complaints Board has received seven complaints regarding a V Australia television advertisement aired from 26 April 2009 for 4 weeks.

The key complaints refer to sections 2.1 and 2.3 of the AANA Code of Ethics. In response to the complaints we make the following points:

1. Section 2.1 Discrimination or vilification of gender: We do not believe that the advertisement discriminates or vilifies women. While the cabin crew featured are women, the key guest being welcomed on board and the centre of the on board service is also a woman which would seem at odds with the feedback that the women are in stereotypical service roles, the man is the object of the 'service'.

2. Section 2.3 Portrayal of sex/sexuality/nudity: Also, we do not believe the advertisement infringes this section. The cabin crew that appear in the advertisement are dressed in V Australia's uniform and there are no explicit sexual references or nudity in the advertisement.

For these reasons it is our view that the advertisement does not depict material contrary to prevailing community standards.

By way of background, V Australia is part of the global "Virgin" brand family. Key to the "Virgin" brand is a sense of fun, cheekiness and often tongue-in-cheek advertising. Service is our unique selling proposition and Virgin Blue commonly uses its crew in marketing and advertising materials. In fact some V Australia crew featured in this particular advertisement.

The intent of the advertisement is to introduce Virgin Blue's new long haul airline, V Australia by featuring the guest journey on board, the features of the aircraft and by highlighting our service in a stylish and contemporary tone whilst capturing a sense of h n that is synonymous with the brand.

We note several of the complaints refer to Richard Branson's line "just wait till we get it up". The line is a reference to getting the aircraft off the ground. The first frame of the commercial shows the aircraft on the tarmac and the last frame after that line is delivered shows the aircraft after take off.

We regret the fact that the complainants found this advertisement personally offensive. However, for the reasons stated above, we do not believe the advertisement infringes AANA Code of Ethics nor do we feel the complaints received are representative of the community views. Therefore, it is our preference to continue airing the advertisement.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board ("Board") considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the "Code").

The Board noted the complainants concerns that the advertisement is inappropriately sexually suggestive, denigrates women and discriminates against female air stewards.

The Board viewed the advertisement and noted that it depicts the female hostesses performing tasks that would not be usually undertaken on a flight. The Board considered that the advertiser had specifically exaggerated the scenes in this advertisement to such an extent that the majority of people would clearly understand the advertiser's tongue-in-cheek approach to promoting its product. The Board was of the opinion that the majority of people would find this advertisement humorous rather than offensive.

Although the Board considered the scenes in the advertisement to be highly exaggerated, it considered that the images were not overly graphic or explicit and did not breach the provisions of the Code relating to the portrayal of sex or sexuality. In light of the obvious exaggeration, the Board determined that the advertisement did not portray people or depict material which discriminated against them on account of their sex or their occupation.'

For the recent complaints the Board noted the complainant's concerns that the advertisement

objectifies and sexualises women, and considered the application of Section 2.1 of the Code, relating to discrimination and vilification on the basis of gender and Section 2.3, relating to the treatment of sex, sexuality and nudity.

The Board noted that the advertisement depicts a fantasy-style scenario of a jet. The Board considered the depiction was completely over-the-top and ridiculous and could not be taken to be seriously suggesting that women are merely sexual objects. The Board therefore determined the advertisement was not discriminatory or vilifying of women generally and found no breach of Section 2.1 of the Code.

The Board noted the comment made by Mr Branson in the advertisement 'wait till we get it up'. The Board noted that Mr Branson and the female passenger show obvious amusement at the comment. The Board considered that the comment is clearly meant as a double entendre but that it was not made in a manner that would be understood by children or in a manner that is meant to be taken seriously or in a harassing manner. The Board considered that this references to sexuality was mild and likely to be understood only by adult viewers. The Board therefore determined there was no breach of Section 2.3 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.