Rowan Dean: Why the Australia Day lamb ad gets my goat
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Rowan Dean

THERE’S nothing I like more than a good Aussie ad campaign. Indeed, as a man who spent many years making them, from Paul Hogan swilling Foster’s Lager to Louie the Fly getting bumped off by Mortein, I know only too well just how much time and effort goes into making each new ad in a popular campaign. There are all the creative people, the army of filmmakers, production teams and actors, the late night focus groups and the endless meetings with dreary old “suits”, clients and “strategic planners”. Every frame in each new ad, every word, every camera angle will have been laboured over for maximum impact and appeal. The key to a great long-running ad campaign? Creative consistency and brand messaging.

Which brings me to the new lamb ad for Australia Day, or, um, whatever it is or isn’t we’re supposed to be celebrating next week. What does the new ad mean? I thought I’d give readers the benefit of my experience and offer up all the subliminal messages I see hidden deep within this squillion-dollar extravaganza.

1. Lamb and Australia Day have broken up, like Brad and Angelina. For over a decade, we’ve been persuaded that lamb and Australia Day go together like, well, Nicole and Keith. Or Hoges and Strop. A marketing marriage made in heaven. Last year the lamb people were so concerned about expats missing out on lamb on Australia Day that they sent the army to rescue them. So it’s sad to learn the marriage is over. This year we’ve been served up the lamb ad, but no Australia Day. Not a single mention. Kind of like pavlova without passionfruit. Awkward. The first subliminal message in this new ad? Lamb and Australia Day have had a bust up.

2. Australia Day is un-Australian. Worse, the new ad actually puts the boot into Australia Day. Blind Freddy knows that the politically correct mob are out to destroy Australia Day. Indigenous activists (as opposed to normal, everyday indigenous Aussies) call it Invasion Day and refuse to celebrate it. Wacko councils like Fremantle have scrapped it altogether. So the PC mob - responsible for this ad have got everybody at a huge barbie but, er, they don’t call it Australia Day. In fact, when Cathy Freeman asks “What’s the occasion?”, the lead character dismissively says: “Do we need one?” Subliminal message: we don’t need Australia Day anymore, it’s un-Australian.

3. Sam Kekovich isn’t an Aussie anymore. For over a decade, we have been hilariously entertained by the Footy Show larrikin Kekovich as an irascible, politically incorrect, loudmouth who is as Aussie as they come and loves his lamb more than anything else. Sam hated vegetarians, “pooncey Brazilian blokes who wear thongs up their bums”, hippies, dole bludgers and all sorts of other “un-Australian” miscreants. But boy did he love his lamb! Sales of lamb went through the roof, especially on Australia Day. Then things started to go awry. A new ad agency began monkeying around with Sam’s character, and his parts started to shrink (I mean his parts in the ads, of course).

He was replaced in one ad by a petite female Asian SBS newsreader. What the politically incorrect Sam thought of that
is anyone's guess. Poor old Sam was even reduced to doing dog food ads. Now it turns out that Sam wasn't really a fair-dinkum Ocker hero after all. In this new ad he's a Serbian extra in a funny hat. Humiliation complete.

4. Everyone can be a stereotype except Aborigines. It's OK to stereotype every race except — heaven forbid! — indigenous Aussies. The Poms are snotty nosed toffs, Germans are drunken louts, the Chinese are silly old Confucians, the French love cheese, Kiwis are thickos etc. But the original indigenous Australians of this land? They look like cool, slightly tanned hipsters from Bondi.

5. Muslims aren't funny, so don't bother writing any Muslim gags.

6. Lots of cool creative types in advertising are vegans so don't bother writing any vegan gags.

7. Canned laughter helps.

8. Adam Gilchrist can act. Finally, a sportsperson who can. What a joy. Shame about his script. Adam's character implies that all non-indigenous Australians are mere guests at this great indigenous barbie. How long can we stay, Adam, or will we get kicked out when the party's over?


10. Don't eat lamb on Australia Day. You can't have both. As with any divorce, you gotta pick sides. So if you are so un-PC as to actually celebrate Australia Day, do it with pork. Or chicken. Or prawns. Or tofu. Or a Number 42 with rice. Or a nice juicy steak. Anything but lamb.