



WILLIAM F. EISNER MUSEUM OF ADVERTISING & DESIGN

BurmaShave Education Packet

<http://www.eisnermuseum.org/educators/index.shtm>

Web Site Activities

This Educators' Guide is intended to complement the Eisner Museum's Exhibition The rise of the Burma-Shave phenomenon parallels the rise and growth of the automobile culture in twentieth century America. The Burma Vita Company was founded in 1925 as Americans were first starting to purchase and drive automobiles.

Founders Clinton and Allen Odell, saw potential value in advertising the company's product with road signs. With \$200 of borrowed money, Allen Odell began to produce humorous road signs in a consecutive series of five or six in a rhyming jingle. Every jingle ended with the company's name. Drivers and their companions on America's newly emerging highway system found the jingles reduced the boredom of a long distance drive.

Examples of Burma-Shave road signs include:

Dinah didn't
Treat him right
But if he'd shave
Dyna-mite!
Burma-Shave

Henry the Eighth
Sure had
Trouble
Short-term wives
Long-term stubble
Burma-Shave

With glamour girls
You'll never click
Bewhiskered
Like a
Bolshevik
Burma-Shave

Ben
Met

Anna
Made a hit
Neglected beard
Ben-Anna split
Burma-Shave

By 1936, Burma-Shave became the nation's number two shaving cream in terms of sales volume. The late 1930s through the late 1950s were the heyday of Burma-Shave. Treasured as a national institution, the Burma Vita Company offered numerous promotions, including jingle writing contests and prizes for numbers of jars saved. In 1938, Burma-Shave offered a free trip to Mars for 900 jars with the jingle:

Free-Free
A Trip
To Mars
For 900
Empty Jars
Burma-Shave

A grocery store owner from Appleton, Wisconsin, who managed to secure 900 jars from his customers took up the challenge. Burma-Shave sent him to Mars, Germany. By the early 1960s, interstate highways changed the pace of American travel. Americans drove farther and faster than ever before. Some scholars believe that the increasing pace of American life doomed the signs. Others believe the cause was the loss of independent management when the Philip Morris Company purchased the Burma Vita Company in 1963. By 1966, with a great loss in market share, the Burma-Shave brand was retired. In 1997, the brand name was purchased by the American Safety Razor Company and reintroduced as a nostalgic line of shaving paraphernalia intended for men over the age of forty-five. eal of exotic products and the relationship between colonialism and trade.

Rowsome, Frank Jr.
New York: New American Library, 1991
The Power of Advertising: Burma-Shave
The Power of Advertising:
Burma-Shave.

CONCEPT:

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The Verse by the Side of the Road: The Story of the Burma-Shave Signs and Jingles.