

# VW smooths out the bumps in the road and racial airbrushing, Absa-style...

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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One of the endless debates in life is about whether women are better drivers than men. The boys will point out that there has never been a female Formula One champion.



Screen grabs from the ad.

On the other hand, women will say that insurance statistics prove women are a better risk than men. Finally – ask a 4×4 instructor which is the best pupil and you will get the answer: women. They listen and don't try to *bliksem* the vehicle to prove their testosterone levels.

From personal experience, I know both men and women whose on-road skill is such that, if I am told they will be behind the wheel, then I would rather walk.

That's probably why the TV ad for VW's "Volkswagen for Life" programme is so appealing.

We see a whole neighbourhood cringing in fear – or just plain ducking to safety – when the "learner driver" in the Golf is out on the streets. People know it's going to be torture – and possibly damage.

The car roars into the driveway – from an angle – and takes out the rubbish bin. The man of the house looks on in anguish as the car comes to an agonised halt, with the L plate on the rear window clearly visible. He looks at the young girl who gets out – and we instantly think she’s the culprit. But, no. She alights from the passenger side, looking as tormented as everyone else by the antics of the driver.

Out climbs the learner – a *doek*-wearing “gogo”, clearly Man of the House’s Mum. And, be honest now – how can you shout at your Mum?

The soothing message is, though: don’t stress, VW is always there is to “Protect, Assist, Repair and Care”... all of which are clearly needed here.

But, at the same time, it makes the point that your VW relationship is going to be for life (and these cars do last a long time – I know, I had a Jetta which I sold when it was 26 years old and it’s still going). And you know there will always be someone to help sort out the bad or anxious times.

The ad is typical VW. It speaks to a great product and to a basic human emotion, as the company’s ads have done for more than 40 years, in a uniquely South African way.

Another Orchid for VW and its long-standing agency, Ogilvy.

There has been plenty written and said – a lot of it negative – about Absa’s new logo and how it looks worrying similar to that for Telkom subsidiary Open Serve. That doesn’t really bother me because I know that in two years’ time, we will all have forgotten about the previous logo.



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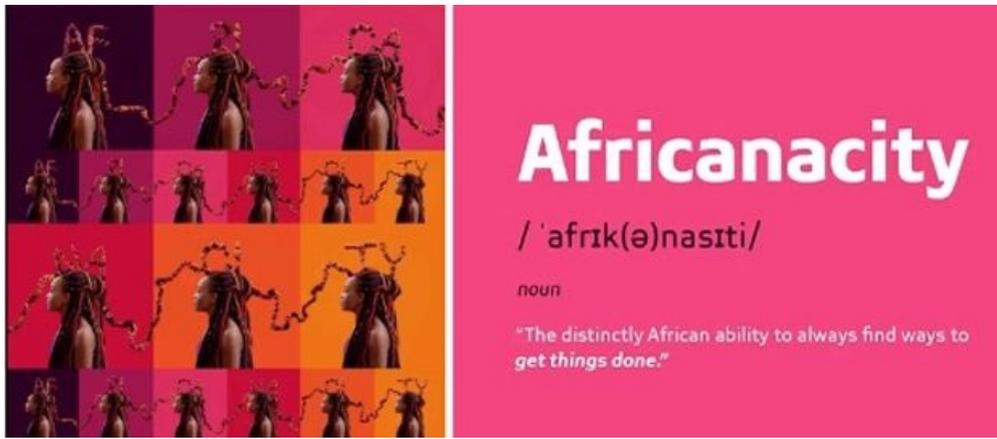
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What does disturb me, though, is the bank’s new “African-acity” campaign. Supposedly a combination of “Africa” and “tenacity”, it hopes to portray Absa as not only looking to Africa for its future, but also saying it is tough and will be around. African-acity is defined as “the distinctly African ability to always get things done.”

Fair enough. Some of the visuals – like the one below, seen on social media – are attractive, it must be said.



What I am trying to get my head around is the TV commercial, which is a general brand-building one. As such, one would expect it to be as inclusive as possible, because Absa has a wide range of clients.



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So, at the risk of being tarred and feathered by the anti-racists, I have to ask: why are there no white people in your ad, Absa? Have they ceased to exist as your clients? Are why people not African enough to be capable of African-acity?

Whether you like it or not, race is a hot button issue at the moment and to run the risk of alienating or insulting some of your potential clients (and whether they are right or wrong in their attitudes or beliefs is irrelevant) is just plain business recklessness.

So, Absa, collect your Onion here...

## 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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