

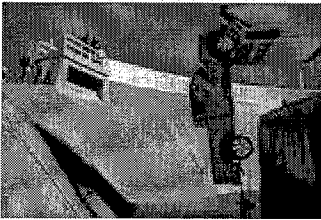
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Spinning Up a Tough Super Bowl Ad, Part 1

'Centrifuge' Ford pickup spot filmed entirely in the Santa Clarita Valley.

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A Ford F-150 pickup hangs by chains connecting its tow hooks to a centrifuge at NTS in Canyon Country, scene of a TV spot.



Objects at rest tend to remain at rest: A Ford F-150 pickup connected by chains to the world's largest centrifuge at NTS hangs around waiting to take a spin.

"Take it for a spin!" invites Ford truck pitchman and "Dirty Jobs" Discovery Channel series creator/host Mike Rowe in one take a new TV commercial that premiered during today's Super Bowl, when sponsors will shell out an average of \$2.7 million for a thirty-second spot they anticipate will be viewed by an estimated 90 million people.

Rowe grins for the camera and gesticulates toward a shiny red, full-sized, stock-naked, brand-new, right-off-the-showroom-floor Ford F-150 pickup.

The 22-foot-long, 5,300-pound truck is hung by its front-end tow hooks like a toy from the world's largest outdoor centrifuge; it's spinning counterclockwise behind Rowe at about 60 miles per hour.

"...And if the tow hooks are this strong, imagine how strong the rest is," Rowe says in another take.

Now, one usually associates a centrifuge with the much smaller counter-top jobs that spin blood samples at medical labs, or the larger one used by NASA (think "The Right Stuff") to prepare chimps and astronauts for the extreme gravitational forces of launch by a rocket-fueled spacecraft from zero to 10,000-plus miles per hour in mere seconds.

And one usually sees a pickup truck with four wheels spinning on a road, parallel to the pavement, moving in a frontally linear direction at freeway speeds.

Not hung by fat steel chains attached to its front-end closed-toe loop rings (Ford-speak for the tow hooks), with all fours off the ground and tailgate flying high, a red blur swooshing around in a 50-foot circle at near-freeway speeds, putting nearly six G's of centrifugal force on the hooks, which, to prove a point, did not break nor send the truck hurtling over the concrete surrounding wall.

The "Centrifuge" commercial is the latest in an ad campaign of extreme demonstrations showing just how tough Ford trucks are, with Rowe on the scene as spokesman and witness to the authenticity of each test.

Surreal, yet completely authentic, with no jury-rigging, camera trickery or post-production editing nonsense, "Centrifuge" is one of the more attention-grabbing commercials vying for game-watchers' eyeballs today.



Tom

Barron, SCV resident since 1975 and director of the Ford F-150 "Centrifuge" commercial, gives his crew the heads-up that cameras are ready to roll for the first takes.



Spinning at 60-plus mph, around six G's of centrifugal force elevate the Ford F-150's tailgate from vertical to near-horizontal.

But the spot is remarkable for reasons beyond its outside-the-box concept and successful, larger-than-life execution.

First, "Centrifuge" was shot entirely in the Santa Clarita Valley.

In tandem with another commercial, "Chinook," filmed locally a couple of days earlier by the same talent and production crew imported from Birmingham, Mich.-based Luminary Films, and already on the air, "Centrifuge" cost Ford and its national ad agency, J. Walter Thompson, "roughly \$2 million," according to Kelly Trudell, JWT agency producer for both spots. A good portion of that cash was spent in Santa Clarita.

Second, the "Centrifuge" location was NTS, a long-established high-tech testing operation on the western edge of Canyon Country, off Golden Valley Road just east of Centre Pointe.

Third, Tom Barron, a 1975 CalArts film school grad and an SCV resident ever since, is head of Studio City-based motion control and visual effects company Image G, and called the shots from behind the camera as the spots' director. Barron and Image G have produced or supplied elements to hundreds of car spots and some recent movies including "Fast and Furious: Tokyo Drift," "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Evan Almighty."

Though Barron has an extensive track record as special-effects whiz, JWT and Ford brought him on board because they know from past experience he's an inventive problem-solver who could figure out how to shoot and deliver these spots without resorting to gimmicks.

SCV locals may know Barron better as president of the Santa Clarita Velo cycling club, seen pedaling along the city's bike paths on the club's regular outings and special events such as the Amgen Tour of California race, which spins into Santa Clarita Feb. 23-24.

Fourth, nearly half a dozen SCV-based vendors provided catering, equipment, technical and other support for the three-day outdoor shoot in November.

According to production manager Sarah George of L.A.-based Worthy Entertainment, local vendors included Grip Brothers Inc. (Valencia; grip equipment), Susie's Production Vehicles (Newhall; motorhomes), Alliance Rental Solutions (Valencia; condors, or camera booms), and J.P. Arman Co. (Newhall; excavation and concrete paving). The commercials' temporary production office, action central for the administrative/accounting end, was ensconced at Santa Clarita Studios.

And for good measure, a Signal reporter and photographer were invited to visit the "Centrifuge" set at NTS on the second night of shooting, to see crews set up the scene and to witness the pickup spin as the cameras rolled.

[Click here for Part 2 -- a behind-the-scenes look at how the "Centrifuge" spot was engineered and filmed.](#)

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