

M★A★S★H costs most

Megabuck TV spots cater to odd viewers

By JAC VERSTEEG

Is there anything you can think of that you want so badly you'd be willing to spend \$150,000 to have it for just 30 seconds? Okay, can you think of anything legal?

Well, according to *Ad Age*, a 30 second commercial aired during CBS's M*A*S*H costs about \$150,000—the most expensive spot on television.

Most M*A*S*H episodes carry six 30 second spots, bringing in revenue that totals about \$900,000 per episode. With that kind of money they could almost afford to hire real doctors to play the parts.

It's possible to get a picture of the typical consumer that M*A*S*H advertisers are trying to reach with their commercials. One recent episode featured ads for nasal spray, Avon and Cover Girl make-up, Kodak cameras, Quasar television sets and Special K cereal. So the average M*A*S*H viewer must be a TV-watching photographer with a runny nose, heavy make-up and an inch to pinch.

The second most expensive commercials air on another CBS show, *60 Minutes*, where 30 second spots run about \$145,000. Twelve commercial spots—six of those 60 minutes—net \$1.74 million, and that pays for an awful lot of check book journalism.

Television

Just before a recent *60 Minutes* segment profiling Johnny Carson, Ed McMahon appeared in a commercial hawking Ford cars. It's surprising he didn't end the commercial with, "And heeeeeeere's Johnny!"

ABC's *Three's Company*, one of television's leading T&A shows—with a mere four T's (as advertisers count), and three A's, brings in more than \$18,500 per anatomical unit for each 30 second spot. That's \$130,000 per spot or \$780,000 each episode.

Commercials on one *Three's Company* show advertised Riunite wine, Oleg Cassini perfume, a movie about Jack the Ripper, Nestle's

Crunch candy bars and some sort of make-up called Moisture Whip. Obviously, drunk psychopathic killers who first wetly whip and then go crunchy, crunchy, crunchy with sweet smelling women are the prime viewers of *Three's Company*.

A couple of ABC's other shows, *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley* also get about \$130,000 for seconds.

Mork and Mindy, charging \$120,000 for its commercials, must be watched by kids and dogs with oral fixations. On one recent episode every commercial spot was for food: Corn Bran cereal, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, Kool-Aid, York Peppermint Patties, Pizza Hut Pizza and, either because Mork can talk to dogs or as a suggestion for cleaning everything else off the teeth, Milk Bone Dog Biscuits.

The meter drop on ABC's *Taxi* is \$120,000, or about \$720,000 each episode, a more than fair fare. *Taxi* commercials have promoted Paul Masson wine as endorsed by Orson Wells, Sheer Energy panty hose, Eveready Batteries, Lee Jeans, Soft Scrub bathtub cleanser and Pizza Hut. There's so much of Orson Wells

that it seems a shame to use him only in one spot. It might be a trifle cheaper to hire Orson by the pound and combine all the commercials so that Orson, one leg clad in panty hose the other in jeans, floats comfortably in his immaculate tub, stuffing himself with wine and pizza while Robert Conrad tries to knock a battery off his shoulder.

WKRP, the fictional radio station, ekes out a living by running commercials for budget burial plots and fishing bait purported to be "the Cadillac of worms." But when the radio goes on TV in *WKRP in Cincinnati*, CBS collects \$110,000 for each spot.

Despite the millions of dollars spent on TV ads each day, nobody knows how effective the ads are. Nevertheless, when Quasar plunks down \$150,000 for a commercial on M*A*S*H it likes to think it's convincing thousands of viewers to buy its TV sets. Should someone let Quasar know it's spending \$150,000 just to give millions of viewers a chance to go to the bathroom?

Jac Versteeg is a television critic for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

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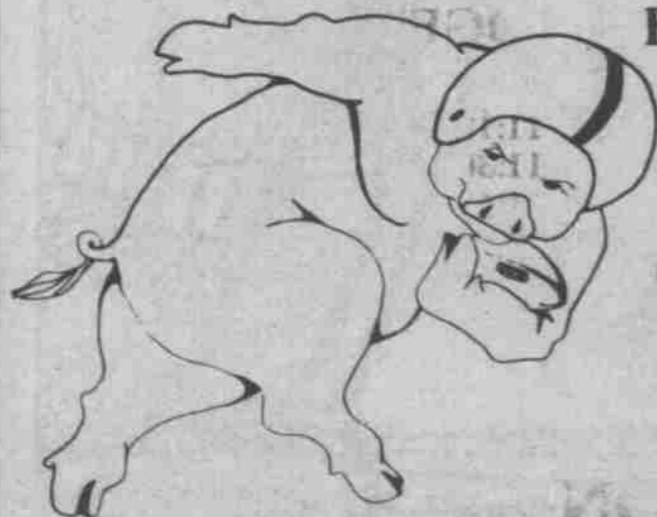
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