

I can't believe I watched the whole thing

by Lawrence Savell

Inch by inch, two women and a rather rotund middle-aged man slowly approach their destination. With eyes like beacons, the group proceeds down the silvery aisle. Their mouths are watering in delicious anticipation. The rapidly increasing beat of three hearts indicates that the goal is in sight.

The target reached, each person seizes a package of brightly-wrapped toilet paper and squeezes it to his or her heart's desire. Embracing the rolls and uttering squeals of delight, they are ecstatic with feelings of joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment.

Is this a spectacle viewed in a mental institution? Is this a scene from Andy Warhol's newest movie? Is this the initiation ceremony of some new southern California cult? On the contrary, it is merely a fitting example of that odious, obnoxious, and infantile establishment known as the television commercial.

This illustration clearly shows

how insipid some commercials can be. Rather than treat their products simply and directly, these merchandisers use more abstract methods to sell their wares. In many instances, the result is a spot which "talks down" to the viewer and questions his mentality. An excellent example of this is the highly provocative, intellectually stimulating ad for "Purina Dog Chow". In this unique segment, a man proceeds to interview half a dozen dogs in an effort to determine their mealtime preferences. As expected, the sponsor's product is unanimously selected. Opinions range from a chihuahua's jovial "This new taste is *muy bueno!*" to a basset hound's morose "Dog Chow makes me very happy." Observers of this phenomenon are left to consider the findings of the distinguished panel.

Another commercial with an equal lack of redeeming social value is that dealing with "Mitchum

anti-perspirant". One is faced with a burly-chested man lying half-naked in bed. With a glint in his eyes, he defiantly asserts, "I didn't use my anti-perspirant last night and I may not today!". As the camera rapidly retreats, one is left to reply: "Who cares?"

It is obvious that commercials are necessary to keep television programs. If these spots were more artistically written, were grouped together rather than spread around, and displayed some levels of variety, then this repulsive world of talking butter packages, procrastinating ketchups, and odor-eating food pads might have some value.