

London 2012 ad breakdown: Olympic gold or also ran?

AD BREAKDOWN

The Magazine's review of advertising

Big brands are rolling out their Olympic adverts. How successful are these three contenders from Adidas, British Airways and Omega?

THE ADVERT: Adidas, Take The Stage

THE BRIEF: Make viewers truly empathise with their Olympics heroes by showing the pain, disappointment and gruelling hard work that goes into preparing for a medal.

THE SCHTICK: Footage of Team GB's stars preparing to compete, intercut with gritty shots of young urban types on the streets of Britain. A rousing voiceover urges all of them to take the knocks necessary to reach the podium.

THE BREAKDOWN: So you thought being an Olympic athlete was fun and glamorous, did you? Beer and skittles and glory?

You were wrong.

As stars Phillips Idowu, Jessica Ennis, Tom Daley and Louis Smith gear themselves up, [a narrator sombrely reminds them](#) of the pitfalls that stand between them and glory.

"Take the knocks, the blows, the heartbreaking disappointment," a narrator orders, in terms reminiscent of the film *Trainspotting's* opening scene.

He continues: "Take the backlash, the criticism, and be written off by people who think you're just a kid."

It's not exactly Whitney Houston's sentimental Olympic anthem *One Moment In Time*, the usual template for footage of sporting endeavour.

But the result is oddly uplifting.

The viewer is invited to share in the misery and physical discomfort a top-level athlete must endure.

Implicitly, the consumer then shares in the emotional journey to any eventual triumph.

It's a smart move, especially in the age of reality television and instant celebrity, to emphasise hard work and sacrifice over medals and glory. The campaign is complemented by a series of online interviews with each of the featured athletes about the highs and lows they have encountered en route to Stratford.

"Take the risk of losing your pride," continues the narrator, over shots of Daley on the diving board and then of an inner-city estate. It's a very British sentiment - the possibility of failure is something it's hard to imagine in an advert aimed at American audiences, for instance.

And in an understated way, the clip is subtly patriotic - a flash of a Union flag painted on the fingernail of a girl in a hooded top intercut with hopeful-looking youthful faces.

The shots of urban UK lends the advert a further note of authenticity, in contrast to the slick, big-budget commercials that populate airtime during the Olympics.

THE VERDICT: Patrick Burgoyne, editor, *Creative Review*: "They've gone for quite a youthful approach and that's all about who their target audience is. Their take on Britishness, with the east London setting, is quite interesting and very forward-looking. With big sporting events, there's a tendency to go very bombastic. But this is quite restrained. It's all about the athletes themselves. When you see the print adverts from this campaign, what you notice is their simplicity and cleanliness and I think they've got it right."

THE ADVERT: British Airways, Don't Fly

THE BRIEF: BA takes Britons out of the UK, right? So show what the airline is doing to support its athletes at home.

THE SCHTICK: A BA jet taxis through the streets of London. Counter-intuitively, the airline is instructing its customers not to fly abroad but to stay at home and cheer their team.

THE BREAKDOWN: The UK's flag carrier is famed for its grand, big-budget, award-winning adverts.

Remember its famous commercial in which thousands of extras in the Utah desert [formed a winking face?](#) Or its 1983 sci-fi-style advert in which the entire island of [Manhattan](#) appeared to fly over the streets of suburban Britain?

[BA's latest effort](#) is no less grandiose in scale. But its tone is far more playful, self-mocking even.

Its premise stems from the conundrum that, in advertising to a British audience, the airline is usually encouraging them to leave the country.

And yet as an Olympic sponsor, it feels obliged to urge them to stay.

The result is more than a little tongue-in-cheek.

A BA jet collects a load of passengers at Heathrow. But instead of taking off, it taxis down the M4 to central London.

The plane trundles past a series of landmarks - Trafalgar Square, the Houses of Parliament, the Shard - before stopping to let its customers disembark at the Olympic park in Stratford.

Some viewers may find it a little too knowing. Others will focus instead on the rather impressive CGI imagery.

There's more for social media users. BA also commissioned an [interactive version](#) which allows browsers to type in their postcodes and see their own street, rendered via Google Maps, through the window of the aircraft as it makes its way to east London.

One rather incongruous choice, however, is the use of The Clash's London Calling as the soundtrack.

Some may question whether a song about nuclear catastrophe and urban unrest is the best way to celebrate the capital, but presumably BA are banking on most listeners only paying attention to the title.

THE VERDICT: Paul Domenet, co-founder of ad agency Johnny Fearless and former creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi, says: "I like that there's something slightly disingenuous about the whole thing, having the nerve to say 'Don't fly with us in the first place'. Self-effacement always goes down well with the British. BA have been responsible for some of the best ads that have ever been produced. What I liked is that it's a return to that scale. It's beautifully crafted. The personalisation is a bit of genius. It adds an extra dimension. It elevates it above a TV ad. This is really how social media should be done - you shouldn't intrude on people's conversations, you should be the subject of their conversations."

THE ADVERT: Omega, Start Me Up

THE BRIEF: Remind the world of Omega's status as the official Olympic timekeeper.

THE SCHTICK: A remix of the Rolling Stones' Start Me Up chimes out as various Olympic athletes prepare to, er, start competing.

THE BREAKDOWN: It's easy for Omega. When you're in charge of timekeeping, you're linked with the drama of the race.

And, of course, with the sense of anticipation and drama as the competitors get ready to begin.

For all its gloss and high production values, the [watchmakers' ad](#) is carefully paced.

The soundtrack is provided by the Rolling Stones - a British band is an obvious choice, particularly with Start Me Up in their back catalogue.

But the track, remixed by producer Don Was, starts and stops - allowing moments of silence, save for an Omega watch ticking, as a series of stars anticipate their big moment.

The camera lingers on the athletes - American pole vaulter Jenn Suhr, Chinese diver Qiu Bo, US sprinter Tyson Gay, South African swimmer Chad Le Clos, US swimmer Natalie Coughlin, and, of course, British heptathlete Jessica Ennis - as they focus on launching themselves into their chosen event.

It's all very artfully shot, with copious use of slow motion photography. Limbs are stretched, brows are furrowed in concentration.

A roar from the crowd is, very briefly, heard, and then quickly blocked out.

The competitors are in position. And then an Omega official - of course - signals the start of the event.

Finally, we hear Mick Jagger singing the song's refrain. A close-up of an Omega watch face reminds us, had we forgotten, who the advert is for.

Of the three, it is this advert which conforms most fully to what we expect from a big-budget commercial.

And yet the lingering tension means it requires the most investment in terms of concentration. Perhaps Omega wants to make the point that its customers are patient and not too easily distracted.

THE VERDICT: Allyson Stewart-Allen, director of International Marketing Partners, says: "The strategy is about anticipation. It's about the excitement of preparing to start a big event. It does convey that tension through the visuals and the soundtrack. It makes sense that the music is British because the company is Swiss. The only risk is that Start Me Up has been used before in ads by Microsoft and others, but I don't think watching this people will think about computer software. It's stylish, in a different way to Adidas - Omega watches start at £1,000. It's a prestige, luxury brand. They're right to make it feel expensive."

