

Remembering The Burma-Shave Signs

-by Gerald Reid

Ah, the old days. I call them the “simpler times”. From about 1926 until about 1963, America witnessed one of the great marketing ideas that rescued a shaving cream company from demise.

Burma-Shave signs were a series of yard-long signs that amused travelers across the states. It was the brainchild of Alan Odell. Alan lobbied his father, Clinton Odell, the founder of Burma-Shave. Clinton didn’t buy the idea in the beginning. Later, Clinton gave the son \$200 to build the signs. The rest, as they say, is history.

What was Burma-Shave? It was a brushless shaving cream. Finally you could travel without taking your cup of soap and brush. The roadside signs were a tremendous success. Even during the depression, sales skyrocketed.

Initially, the words didn’t rhyme. It wasn’t long before the clever sayings were rhyming and the entire traveling family looked forward to them. The wording was changed about every year. Many people sent in the rhymes and were rewarded with \$100.

The signs were in 45 states. Seven thousand messages were used before the end came. Times changed. Progress came, and people began to travel on four-lane highways and, eventually, a super highway system called an expressway. Cars moved faster. Like the “See Rock City” signs of yesteryear, the Burma-Shave signs are, sadly, no longer a part of our landscape.

Some more Burma-Shave signs:

A CHRISTMAS HUG
A BIRTHDAY KISS
AWAITS THE WOMAN
WHO GIVES THIS

ALTHOUGH WE’VE SOLD
SIX MILLION OTHER
WE STILL CAN’T SELL
THOSE COUGH DROP
BROTHERS.

USE THIS CREAM
A DAY OR TWO
THEN DON’T CALL HER
SHE’LL CALL YOU

BEN MET ANNA
MADE A HIT
NEGLECTED BEARD
BEN-ANNA SPLIT

IS HE LONESOME
OR JUST BLIND
THIS GUY WHO DRIVES
SO CLOSE BEHIND

IF YOU DON’T KNOW
WHOSE SIGNS THESE ARE
YOU CAN’T HAVE DRIVEN
VERY FAR

BELOW: A Burma-Shave saying that I remember. We surmised that it was referring to a Sears-Roebuck substitute. (If Sears didn’t have the color shirt you ordered, for example, they would substitute a different color.)

Read from the bottom up as you would if you were traveling the same direction as the car.

