

Big Story that packs a ray of inspiration

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Tracker strikes the right chords by keeping it true.

Good TV ads, we all know, are an art form at best and can provide marvellous entertainment. And, in this country, we do Big Story TV ads very well indeed. Generally, it is financial services and investment companies that have the marketing story, and the budget, to put together a piece that would not be out of place in a cinema. Which is why when I first saw this ad, I was guessing: Allan Gray, Momentum or Sanlam. In the end, it turned out to be for Tracker, the car tracking and recovery company.

I shouldn't have been surprised because Tracker has done some striking TV commercials. Remember the one about "Memories", which ended with a frame of an armed Tracker officer rescuing a baby from a hijacked car? She won't remember him, it says, but he has given her a lifetime of memories. Powerful stuff, and well told. The latest TV ad, *fighting at the moment*, is equally cinematic in its storytelling and also wonderfully evocative of black life in Depression-era America. We see an obviously blind young boy, obviously with a love for music, hanging around the piano player – who initially chases him off, but then brings him in, puts him in front of a piano and works patiently to mould him. At the end, we see the young man, beaming as only Ray Charles can, singing and bashing the ivories to the delight of his audience. The mentor looks on with satisfaction. Then the punchline: Never underestimate the power of looking after something. It is an obvious conclusion – and one that would fit well into a financial service ad – but it works nevertheless. And it evokes Ray Charles and his roots so well, how could I not give it an Orchid? Well done to Tracker. If someone would like to let me know the agency and production house behind the ad, I'd be happy to award them a public Orchid, too.



So this is how I see it going down. It's a party for young clevers – pick your venue (Sandton or Sea Point) – and the dress code is black Levi's, black T-shirts, a ponytail or two and a cute little hat. Winklepicker shoes optional. We are creatives, dude, and we don't want to look ordinary... Also, to outride while the herd thunders on, we gravitate towards the different. Now it is some cool recycled African-American music from the southern plantations, given a redneck blast by an all-white rock group in the 1970s. Bru, this is so cool. So, everybody gets down... and sniffing. Some time later, in the creative engine room of the agency where the dudes go to every morning to, like, conform, the marketing idea is there, the ad is almost sewn up. But we need music, bro... Hey! Let's use that *Black Betty* song from the party that time. And so, at least three comparatively recent South African ads have been adorned with the *Black Betty* song, done in the 1970s by American rockers Ram Jam, after Lead Belly first put it on vinyl back in the 1930s. Before that, it was a favourite of black

prisoners on the Texas chain gangs. It all sounds pretty cool – for a car, perhaps... but for biltong? On TV these days you will hear *Black Betty* flogging Checkers food. What on earth that has to do with the supermarket chain's food – and why it is so different from the rest of the good-to-excellent Checkers advertising – is beyond me.

Maybe I'm not cool, but I'm afraid it gets an Onion from me. Two readers also feel strongly about *Black Betty*. One agrees with me. The other disagrees:

I must express my disgust at the soundtrack of the Checkers TV advertisement. My bleat goes like this: "Black Betty had a child, Damn thing gone wild..." Are these the lyrics to the opening soundbite of the new Marie Stopes Abortion Clinics' Africa drive? No! Not close. That's the theme music for the new TV ad for Checkers family supermarkets. I'm quite sure you will run and rerun the ad to see you are hearing properly. I did. Has Checkers fired its entire marketing department? Well, it should have. Let's not even discuss the agency that put this sorry mistake into production. Or did they just give the job to one of the checkout clerks in the interests of career advancement (and, of course, considering the tight financial position we all find ourselves in). Talk about a monumental image fail! Checkers and the agency should receive a pocket of Onions; the country's finest! Thanks for the marvellous column. Mike Braum

First I must say how much I enjoy your column in the Saturday Star. For me a must-read always. I would like to nominate the creators of the Checkers adverts that I get to see during the e.tv news about 6.45pm, for one of your Orchids. Really punchy short clips with some amazing rock guitar music and the message definitely comes across that Checkers sells great food and wine. Richard Holmes

Which goes to show, we're all different. If you have seen the ad, let me know which side of the fence you are on – brendan.seery@inl.co.za.

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ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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