

August 12, 2008



**Stuart Elliott's In Advertising**

## A Film on the Trucking Life Also Promotes a Big Rig

“DRIVE and Deliver,” a documentary film about truck drivers that is scheduled to make its debut next week, looks like a Hollywood movie and is directed by a Hollywood director. The marketing campaign resembles a Hollywood effort, too, with a red-carpet premiere, screenings, plans for charitable donations and a contest for student filmmakers.

But “Drive and Deliver” is not being bankrolled by a big studio like [Warner Brothers](#), a smaller one like Lionsgate or even an independent filmmaker. Rather, the estimated \$2 million budget is being underwritten by a division of the [Navistar International Corporation](#) to help promote a new long-haul truck, the LoneStar, to be shipped to dealers in October with a sticker price of \$120,000 to \$140,000.

Navistar International will spend perhaps an additional \$3 million to stimulate interest in the documentary, out of a total marketing budget for the LoneStar estimated at \$15 million.

“Drive and Deliver,” which runs about 45 minutes, follows three long-haul truckers as they travel around the country in the spring, making deliveries with early-production LoneStar models on loan from Navistar International.

The nitty-gritty of their lives is chronicled in segments that are interspersed with beauty shots of the LoneStars as well as frank discussions by the truckers of their backgrounds, families, dreams and disappointments. The soundtrack includes music by [Merle Haggard](#), [Lynyrd Skynyrd](#), the Marshall Tucker Band and Hank Williams.

“Drive and Deliver” is another example of a booming trend in marketing known as branded entertainment. Instead of running commercials or providing products to be placed in the backgrounds of scenes, advertisers become involved in the content of movies and TV shows.

The documentary was produced for Navistar International by Fathom Communications, an agency owned by the [Omnicom Group](#) that specializes in branded entertainment, online advertising and direct marketing. The movie is being previewed on a Web site that is also produced by Fathom ([internationaltrucks.com/film](http://internationaltrucks.com/film)). “The insight was that truckers are very passionate about their jobs and want to tell their stories,” said Mark Leger, managing director at the Chicago office of Fathom. “They want someone to amplify their voice and become their advocate.

“The film is a platform to create indelible interactions between the long-haul trucking community and the brand,” he added, “and elevate the conversation beyond products and product specs.”

Navistar International joins a lengthening list of companies in taking part in branded entertainment. Others include [Chrysler](#), [Del Monte](#), [Ford Motor](#), [General Motors](#), [Heineken USA](#), [Tommy Hilfiger](#), [Liberty Mutual](#) and [Unilever](#). The goal is to counter consumers’ increasing ability to zap, zip through or otherwise avoid conventional advertisements by embedding the pitches in the programming.

“Unlike a lot of consumer companies, we don’t have to debate how much we spend on TV,” said Al Saltiel, vice president for marketing for the truck group at the Navistar division of Navistar International in Warrenville, Ill., “because the answer is zero.”

“This is about generating word of mouth, positive word of mouth” for the LoneStar, he added, which is intended to become the top-of-the-line truck sold by the company.

The movie, filmed in a cinema vérité style, was directed by Brett Morgen, whose credits include “The Kid Stays in the Picture,” a documentary about the Hollywood producer Robert Evans, and “Nimrod Nation,” a series for the Sundance Channel cable network about the high school basketball team in a Michigan town.

“There were hundreds of casting sessions, and Brett did his own casting,” said Richard Linnett, director for entertainment marketing at the Fathom office in New York, who said he accompanied Mr. Morgen for the filming for “5,250 miles, 17 states and 21 days.”

Mr. Morgen chose the three drivers featured in the film to represent different aspects of long-haul trucking. One driver, Steven Donaldson, of Fayetteville, Ohio, represents the career trucker. The second, Chris LeCount, of Goshen, Ind., represents a younger generation. The third, Tim Young, of Flat Rock, Ala., drives, as Mr. Linnett put it, “to put food on the table for his family.”

A rough cut of “Drive and Deliver” provided by Fathom had perhaps a few too many shots of the behemoth LoneStars, their chrome and oversize grilles gleaming brightly. (Some of those shots will probably be edited out before next week, Mr. Linnett said.)

But the praise for the new trucks from the drivers, as well as from people they encountered while making their deliveries, seemed genuine.

“I have a nice Peterbilt, but I fell in love with the International,” Mr. Donaldson, who is 59, said in a telephone interview this week as he drove the Peterbilt along Interstate 275 in Ohio after dropping off a shipment in Cincinnati. (The LoneStar he drove in the movie was returned to Navistar International after filming.)

“It had to do a lot for me to fall in love with a truck,” the plain-spoken Mr. Donaldson said, reminiscing about those he had owned, including a 1974 Kenworth.

It “took me three days to even think about getting used” to being followed around continuously by the movie crew, Mr. Donaldson said.

“Everybody was my boss, and I never had a boss,” he added. “That didn’t go over too good.”

Mr. Donaldson is eloquent in the documentary about the ups and downs of his work and life, particularly when he describes the death of his son, Daniel Park Donaldson, at age 27.

The other drivers are also compelling as they discuss subjects like the economic forces pressuring them (“It’s a hard life sometimes,” Mr. Young says) and being a trucker (“It takes a strong person to be out here on the road,” Mr. LeCount says).

The documentary is to have its premiere on Aug. 22 at a major industry event, the Great American Trucking Show in Dallas. The red carpet will be billed as a “tread carpet,” to accommodate the estimated 600 truckers and other invited guests.

Subsequent screenings are planned at more than 50 truck stops around the country. After that, the film is to be released on DVD.

Some DVDs are likely to be sold on the film’s Web site and at truck stops, with a part of the proceeds to be donated to charity. Other DVDs could be given away to truckers who provide contact information like e-mail addresses — the better to be wooed to buy LoneStars by Navistar International dealers.

“Drive and Deliver” is intended to complement an ad campaign for other Navistar International truck models. The campaign, which carries the theme “Miles ahead,” is created by the Navistar International agency for advertising, Bagby & Company in Chicago.

Bagby has also developed unconventional ideas for the company like a coffee table book about its history. Fathom and Bagby are working together on the campaign to promote the documentary.

The student contest, to create films about truckers, is to be held among attendees of more than 50 film and media courses at universities and film schools. Prizes are to include tuition and cameras — but no LoneStars.