

Rexall Takes Merciless Ribbing On NBC Comedy

“What’s a *Rexall*?”

--- “Frankie Remley”

Lincoln, Me. (DG)—

This article is an example of a sponsor who was the victim of constant joking on the program it sponsored--- yet had enough of a sense of humor to continue sponsoring it without any hurt feelings. What makes this program/sponsor relationship unique--- Arthur Godfrey and Henry Morgan weren’t involved with this program.

When *Rexall* signed on to sponsor NBC’s *PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW* in 1948, the drug store chain was involved with one of the funniest and most unpredictable situation comedies of radio’s golden age.

As with most half hour radio programs, there were 3 commercials on each broadcast. There were 2 serious commercials for *Rexall* at the beginning and end of the program. These commercials featured the “*Rexall Family Druggist*,” as he described the services and products each *Rexall Drug Store* provided. These commercials were informative and uneventful. It was during the program’s story where *Rexall* received a merciless ribbing from the program’s cast.

The program starred Phil Harris as he portrayed himself (the same character he played on *THE JACK BENNY PROGRAM*). He was the bandleader of a group of misfits that made Spike Jones & The City Slickers look like the New York Philharmonic. Phil (the character) had a large ego and was very impressed with his curly hair and dimples. Alice Faye, Phil’s wife on the program (and in real life), portrayed herself as a retired movie star who gave up her career to be a housewife and mother. Although she loved Phil, Alice put him in his place when he needed it--- which was often. Making life more complicated than usual was Frankie Remley (played by Elliott Lewis), Phil’s “**best friend(?)**” Remley played the guitar on the band. His ideas got Phil into constant trouble with Alice, the sponsor, and the human race in general. To make matters worse, Remley didn’t mind stabbing his best friend in the back for his own personal gain. Julius, the deliver boy (played by Walter Tetley), admired Alice very much, but didn’t share that same warm hearted feeling for Phil. Since he had this hostility inside his small frame, Julius didn’t mind embarrassing and humiliating Phil and Remley when he had the



chance to do so. Willie Faye, Alice's brother (played by Robert North), was another thorn in Phil's side. He was a nerd-like accountant who kept a very close watch on Alice's finances. Willie irritated Phil no end, especially when he greeted him with, "**Goooooooood morning, Philip.**" Rounding out the cast was Mr. Scott (played by Gale Gordon), who was in charge of *Rexall's* sponsorship of the program. Among any of the major characters listed, the name *Rexall* was raked among the coals on every broadcast. ■

In order to keep going without interruption, the middle commercial was blended into the story line. The radio listeners never knew what would be said about the beleaguered drug store chain--- but they did know it was going to be funny. For example, the scene was in Mr. Scott's office. Earlier on the broadcast, Scott ordered Phil to fire Remley from his band. On this particular scene, Phil and Remley tried to get the *Rexall* boss to reconsider. Unknown to Scott, Remley paid Julius \$20 to come in and give him a rousing endorsement. Although he was paid the money, Julius had a double cross in mind. When he entered the office, Julius tried to butter Scott up with his "**admiration(?)**" for *Rexall*. Although he said he was too young to "**smoke them,**" Julius stated, "**My father have been smoking Rexalls for nigh on to 20 years.**" Needless to say, smoking *Rexalls* didn't impress Scott. He informed Julius that *Rexall* made drug products. Intentionally misunderstanding what Scott said, Julius then confused *Rexall* for a brand of car. He stated, "**My mother won't drive anything else but a Rexall.**" When Scott began to add up what was going on, Julius took great delight in exposing the master plan. The *Rexall* boss ordered Remley to leave his office immediately--- and if Phil didn't leave behind him, **he** would be fired, too.

This is a sample of the humorous abuse *Rexall* received on *THE PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW*. Since it sponsored the program for 2 seasons, the *Rexall* people didn't mind the humorous comments made about the drug store chain. With the sensitive nature of some sponsors, *Rexall* deserves a medal for being a good sport.