

Commercial Boners

Amuse Listeners

Part I

Lincoln, Me. (DG)---

If you were to watch a broadcast of a radio program from the studio, you would notice (for the most part) the precision of the sound effects; the lines the stars were saying; and the announcer narrating the commercials for the sponsor. While these programs were usually accurate to the second, you also have to remember that the majority of radio programs during the golden age were presented live--- and since humans were known for making mistakes, the precision was marred with numerous boners and bloopers. To the sponsor's chagrin, many of the on the air screw-ups were by announcers doing the commercials for their product. This series of articles will take a look at some of those flubs that sponsors would rather have us forget.

■ The first boner we'll cover concerns a personal favorite of mine. It took place on the September 21, 1939 broadcast of **SUNDIAL**, an early morning program of recorded music and chitchat on station **WJSV** in Washington, D.C. The host of the program was a young man named Arthur Godfrey. He was in the middle of presenting a commercial for the motion picture *The Women*, when he let out a vicious sneeze for all the radio listeners to hear. In true Godfrey manner, he excused himself, let out a chuckle, and said, "**I always wonder what I'd do if I ever had to sneeze on the air..... now I know.**" Godfrey continued and finished the commercial as if nothing had happened.



Another common human function was the cough. There were 2 boners that featured coughing--- one boner was the perfect lead-in to the commercial, and the other couldn't have happened at a worse time.

At the end of a newscast, **NBC** journalist Frank Blair's final task was to say his name and sign off. To his credit, he did say his name--- but when he finished, Blair started to cough uncontrollably. Fortunately, his coughing led in to the transcribed commercial for **Super Anahist Cough Syrup**. Let us hope Blair took some of the newscast's sponsor.

The second coughing boner took place during the late 1950's. During this time, there were rumblings concerning cigarette smoking and health. The last thing any cigarette sponsor needed was a coughing announcer. Unfortunately, the announcer for **GANG BUSTERS** did just that! Interesting enough, he didn't start coughing until he mentioned the program was sponsored by **Kool Cigarettes**.



A very unflattering boner took place during World War II. The commercial was to persuade the housewives to save and turn in used fat. If you're not familiar how or why this was important (and it was **VERY** important), let me explain.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on that terrible day in 1941, it was a wake up call for the American people. Military equipment and bombs were needed desperately and quickly! With the help of radio and the *War Advertising Council*, the listeners were asked to turn in various items for the war effort. One of these items was used fat from roasting meat. Once the meat was finished roasting, the housewife poured the meat's fat into a can. Once the can was full, she turned in to the local butcher. From there, the butcher turned in the fat to the government for the making of glycerin, which was used for the production of explosives.

In a nutshell, it was extremely important for the housewives to turn in as much used fat as possible. A commercial of this magnitude didn't need a boner

that could antagonize the patriotic housewives. Unfortunately, there was one! The announcer was supposed to say, "**Ladies, take in your cans of fat to your local butcher.**" With a slight twist of the words at the wrong place, the announcer said, "**Ladies, take your fat cans in to your local butcher.**" Fortunately for the free world, the housewives ignored the announcer's comment about their physical features and continued to turn in used fat.

If the radio listeners believed what they heard on a broadcast of the *GILLETTE CAVALCADE OF SPORTS*, the United States was under the rule of the *Gillette Safety Razor Company*.

The program began with the ring announcer introducing the 2 boxers who were to participate on the upcoming bout. After they were introduced, the ring announcer asked the people who attended the bout to stand up for the playing of the National Anthem. The people in attendance heard Francis Scott Key's classic song. The radio listeners also expected to hear Mr. Key's creation. What they actually heard was the anthem of a new regime--- which sounded just like *Gillette's "Look Sharp! Feel Sharp! Be Sharp!"* jingle.

Since the *Gillette* invasion of the United States never appeared in any history book, it had to have been a boo-boo by the person who pressed the button to play the *Gillette* jingle at the most inopportune time.



Another advertising boner took place on **Columbia's** **PROFESSOR QUIZ**. This was an unusual situation, because the commercials weren't involved. The problem was it was the first show for the program's new sponsor, **Teel Liquid Dentifrice**--- and to "**Professor Quiz**" (Craig Earl), old habits were hard to break.

On the program, Professor Quiz stated the first contestant would receive a jar of the program's sponsor, **Noxzema Skin Cream**--- which was the **OLD** sponsor. The very moment **Noxzema Skin Cream** was mentioned, announcer Robert Trout corrected Professor Quiz by saying "**Teel!**" What made this boner really interesting, Professor Quiz kept insisting each contestant received a jar of **Noxzema**, only to have a desperate Trout yell out "**TEEL!**" as loud as he could.

When the broadcast came to a merciful end, an exhausted and shaken Trout said this unusual good night to Professor Quiz, "**Good night, Professor..... GOOD NIGHT INDEED!**"

Our final boner for this article was aired over a local radio station. It concerned a flustered announcer reading a commercial for **General Electric** and a woman named Annie. Previous to this boner, Annie was doing her absolute best to distract the announcer--- she also distracted him on this commercial in a big way. While reading the commercial (or trying to), Annie sat on the announcer's lap and gave him a loud kiss for all the radio listeners to hear. The announcer was so flustered, he couldn't continue reading the commercial. To make matters worse, Annie told him to go on and read it.

If the announcers think they can slip a boner by the listeners without them noticing, they also believed the Brooklyn Bridge was one heck of a good buy. On the contrary, the listeners were very astute at what they heard. If any listener caught an announcer botching up a commercial, it was a good chance that flub will be printed in the "Bulls & Boners" section of **Radio Guide** magazine. We will take a look at some of those boners the listeners caught in Part II of this series.