

Volkswagen ticks all the boxes, Eskom not so much

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Being a petrol head, I have been fascinated by how the global car market has evolved over the past 15 years because it has often been a case of marketing bullsh*t baffling consumers' brains.



I am not talking about electric vehicles, which are touted as the panacea for all things which ail planet earth but are also a significant threat in and off themselves because of their rapacious consumption of raw materials.

The SUV ploy

I am talking about how clever marketers have managed to convince tens of millions of moms and dads around the world that they cannot do without an SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle) in their lives; that they can feel like Tarzan and Jane as they tackle the unrelenting urban jungle; that they are explorers with a sense of adventure; that they are rugged individualists who choose to go their own way (not noticing the millions of other lemmings doing exactly the same thing).

Yet, in most cases, the SUV does not offer a significant advantage over that much-maligned and old-fashioned family transport, the sedan. SUVs are higher (but unless you want to climb pavements regularly, the extra ground clearance means little), they are less stable on the road (because of a higher centre of gravity) and have worse braking than an equivalent sedan or hatchback. And they use more fuel. The supposed trump card of the genre – lots of space – is often also not true in practice.

I owned a VW Jetta sedan for more than 20 years and it did solid, reliable duty as the main family transport for most of that time, traveling to four different countries and faultlessly covering most of SA's national roads in the process. It swallowed the family's holiday luggage in its large boot and had the benefit of good legroom in the back so the *kinders* didn't keep kicking and saying "are we there yet?"

A companion for the family

That's by way of saying I was always going to be partial to VW's new Polo Sedan. It reminds me so much of my old Jetta. And, like the Jetta, it has the classic VW family fun and emotion in its advertising.

We see a young family, heading off on holiday, with dad solidly in control and loving the good time they are making on their journey (that did sound more than a bit familiar, to be honest...) Then everyone says they need to stop for a wee break – not something dad has considered because the Polo sips fuel and guarantees a long range. Use your water bottle, he says, instantly regretting it as the disgusted looks of the family becomes apparent. So, they turn off at some run-down petrol station where the only loo is a "Porta-Potty".

Dad reads a paper while he waits, clearly pleased that his internal range is as good as the Polo's.

It's simple, it's realistic and yet it showcases the Polo as the perfect companion for a family. And, it's yet another VW ad that appeals to its target market – families. So, for the umpteenth time, Volkswagen SA and agency Ogilvy pick up another Orchid from me.

Eskom

Perhaps it is because that I came home from Kruger National Park to a 42-hour power outage that I am still angry about load shedding. I won't get into the serial nonsense excuses put out by City Power in Joburg as to why such large swathes of the city were without power for so long – but even as I fumed, Eskom's silly electricity-saving tips were popping up on my social media timelines.



It is beyond bizarre in normal marketing terms – although not much is normal in South Africa these days – for a brand to actively encourage its consumers not to buy. Yet, this is what our state powerless utility has been doing in order to reduce demand.

There may be some logic in that from an operational perspective, but it is just tossing salt into the consumer's wounds. Using less now, we all know, is only going to result in requests by Eskom for higher tariffs later, which will go even higher as the corporation and its municipal resellers feel the pinch of more and more households installing solar power.

Also, Eskom, I am tempted to leave the power on in revenge.... Although I am going to have to run my pool filter for an extended period to make up for the two days nothing happened.

You could have saved the advertising money instead of irritating your captive audience even further. An Onion for insensitivity...

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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