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2012 ST Vehicle Graphics Contest:

Six Packs a Punch

No flagging with the latest Vehicle Graphics Contest edition

By Steve Aust

Five years ago, ST's staff (and me in particular) held its collective breath when we unveiled a vehicle-graphics competition. We took a risk by producing a new competition separate from the International Sign Contest. However, the dozens of expert, vehicle-graphic providers who've annually entered and taken their shots at victory have never let us down.

This sixth annual version has especially pleased us. Perhaps the wrap market's hyper-competitiveness has pushed providers' creative envelopes; maybe film, ink and tool improvements have emboldened wrap artists to embrace more complex vehicles. Perhaps proliferating wrap-education opportunities have given more industry professionals the knowledge and confidence to enter, and excel in, the wrap market. Most likely, it's all of the above.

Whatever the reasons, the edgy designs and vibrant color palettes displayed over the following pages celebrate how much the market has evolved. We received 242 entries, and nearly all of them conveyed worthwhile examples of effective design, production and installation.

Several Cincinnati-area providers graciously served as judges previously, but I thought a change of scenery might provide different perspective. So, I ventured approximately 70 miles northwest to Green Sign Co. (Greensburg, IN). The full-service signshop has served the Midwest and points beyond for 40 years, and vehicle wraps have increasingly filled its portfolio.

The shop floor was unusually quiet (shop owner Shawn Green said many of his staff, who'd worked long hours on a recently completed installation, were given the day off as comp time), so few distractions affected the judges. The panel – Green; Rose Perdue, the shop's VP and sales rep (and Shawn's mother); production

manager Kevin Sims; and designer and vehicle wrapper Robert Brancamp – took their job seriously. During the initial scoresheet-tabulation phase, the judges proved to be the strictest graders in contest history. Not a single perfect score – a 30, or 10s in three criteria: theme, complexity and artistic merit – was issued, and a composite score in the low 20s meant high praise.

The quartet moved with remarkable efficiency through the second round, where they debated the merits of first-round survivors and issued awards. Experience has taught me that assembling four judges who know each other, rather than four strangers, creates more open dialogue and lively exchanges of opinions.

Although they didn't quite make the splash I'd hoped, the 12 food-truck projects submitted earned the top two places and an honorable mention in the Service Vehicles category. Ideally, I'd like to receive enough entries to create an individual, food-truck category. Entries in the Transit Vehicle and Watercraft Graphics categories remarkably improved, and the projects that placed in the Unique Vehicles category displayed impressive creativity.

Best of Show came down to two contestants: Great Big Signs' (Kyle, TX) truck, which promoted The Melting Cone, comprised an unusual, 3-D, hardcoated-foam sculpture and bright, pastel colors, and bluemedia's Coors Light light-rail-train wrap, which parlayed Coors' "Love Train" campaign into a wrap that brought the "Silver Bullet" beer to life on otherwise drab, public transit. The judges thought bluemedia's work presented slightly more branding impact and curb appeal. Those who attend SGIA can learn more about the champion project. Bluemedia president Jared Smith will make a presentation, with other project stakeholders, on Friday, October 19, at 9:30 a.m. in the Graphics Application Zone. ■

CATEGORY 1: Service Vehicles

The 2012 ST Vehicle Graphics Contest

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FIRST PLACE

Fabricator
Wicked Wraps
Lynwood, WA
(425) 238-6563
www.wickedwraps.net

Designer/Installer
Wade Becher

Client
BiteMe Cupcakes

Looking to capitalize on a growing trend, the customer brought an aging school-transport van to Wicked Wraps' shop to be transformed into a mobile cupcake vendor.

Becher photographed and measured the vehicle to prepare for a custom design template from The Bad Wrap. He also hired a window company to create a service window and fold-out counter for the point of sale.

"The customer wanted a wrap that was a combination of cute and edgy to grab attention," Becher said. "Blending pink and black captures that combination pretty well. I took high-resolution photos of some of her cupcakes to incorporate them into the design."

Using the Bad Wrap template, he refined the design with Adobe Photoshop. Then, he created the wrap with Avery Graphics' MPI 1005 Supercast EZ Apply RS 2.1-mil, air-release media, which Wicked Wraps printed with a Mutoh ValueJet 1304 eco-solvent-ink printer



and Eco-Ultra inks. The shop decorated the windows with Avery's Supercast 3528 calendered, 50%-perforated window film and 2.1-mil cast, window-vinyl overlaminates.

To preserve the plaid-pink logo, chocolate brown and coconut white, Becher coated the wrap with Avery's DOL 1360-54 1.3-mil, cast, gloss overlaminates with a ProLam 1600ii 63-in. laminator. They completed the wrap with Geek Wraps squeegees and magnets, and a propane torch.

For continuity across the entire vehicle, he fabricated custom wheel covers with images of pink frosting (a cupcake's best part, Becher said) from 3A Composites' Dibond® aluminum-composite material, which was wrapped with the MPI 1005 material.