

Lone ranger rides again



The Lone Ranger is gunning for the Marlboro Man with a small tribe of Tontos to keep the ammo coming in technicolor.

By GARY MARTIN
Pictures: NEIL DUNCAN

** ABOVE: The Lone Ranger in action*

He is a crack shot with a can of spray paint and his target is every cigarette billboard across Australia.

Tough Marlboro Man has been grievously wounded in many midnight showdowns, but he keeps puffing away, frustrating his masked adversary.

The self-styled Lone Ranger trying to put Marlboro Man in Boot Hill is Lachlan Partridge, a 21-year-old Sydneysider hooked on the fight against the tobacco industry and its advertising partners.

Lachlan, a serious young man, is the son of the late Frank Partridge, the Victoria Cross winner who became a household name on Bob Dyer's Pick-A-Box television quiz in the early 1960s.

Partridge jun. is the fastest spray-can in the land. If this was the Wild West, fresh-faced Lachlan would be the Billy the Kid of billboards, with a horde of bounty hunters on his paint-spattered trail.

He rides shotgun for BUGAUP, the brazen gang that goes on the rampage against huge outdoor Posters. BUGAUP stands for Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions - which they see as tobacco, alcohol and sexist advertising.

Graffiti to their fathers meant a simple "Kilroy was here", chalked inoffensively on a World War 2 packing case or a wall. The modern message from BUGAUP is never so bland. A poster for Winfield is defaced into "... anyhow, have a sickie," Victoria Bitter becomes "Victoria Killer," a Johnnie Walker sign ("Born 1836, still going strong") is scotched to read "born 1824, died 1856 of cirrhosis of the liver."

"Cigarette billboards are my speciality. I've done thousands of them," drawls Lone Lachlan, who joined the hard core of BUGAUP guerrillas in 1982. He is



** ABOVE: Lachlan and partner attack a billboard*

turned off not so much by tobacco and alcohol themselves, but the way they are glossed up for consumers.

Such outspokenness on top of his relentless BUGAUPing, has not endeared this blond Kimosabe to the tobacco industry. Someone recently scrawled over his car, a week within two attacks on the vehicles of other BUGAUP activists, one of whom was the eccentric Sydney stirrer with the unbelievable name of Lord Bloody Wog Rolo.

The son of a Victoria Cross winner is giving cigarettes and alcohol advertisers a spray...

Lachlan's yellow Corolla is covered in anti-smoking stickers and hand-painted slogans, such as "Tobacco sponsorship - a pain in the arts," "Come to cancer country," "Is your child hooked yet?" and "Land of the Dreamtime or Marlboro Country'

This determination to wage a personal war on the tobacco lobby offends some people, who think the son of a famous war hero should know better.

"I get a bit annoyed when people say 'your father would be ashamed of you'. How do they know? I was only 14 weeks old when my father died in a car crash so I never knew him. It's certainly a different world today. Maybe he'd support what I'm doing."

What Lachlan does is vandalise billboards almost anywhere, any time. He suggested we go along and see how he does it openly, in broad daylight.

The selected target was a billboard beside the train tracks near Artarmon station on Sydney's affluent north shore. The time: about 5 p.m., peak hour. He got out of his car with a couple of accomplices, strode to the billboard with a can of white gloss, and nonchalantly went to work as passing train drivers hooted at the painting party.

Curious residents came outside their houses to have a gander. By this time, we were getting edgy at the thought of being sprung by a police car, but Lachlan was unperturbed. More people gathered on the railway bridge a little way up the line and we split.

"I'll catch you later," Lachlan said casually. "The job's not finished yet."



** ABOVE: Lone Ranger Lachlan blasts the enemy.*

Later on, with the poster suitably defaced, Partridge reasoned out his activities: "I'm not afraid, though I don't go out of my way to find danger.

"I've been very blatant about a lot of things I've done in BUGAUP, but it's less hazardous than it used to be, as far as the police are concerned"

"The tobacco companies seem to be backing away from prosecuting us to avoid publicity. We're a thorn in their sides and they worry what we'll do next."

Last year BUGAUP set up a tent embassy in North Sydney opposite the offices of the agency whose American parent dreamed up the Marlboro Man campaign many years ago.

A BUGAUP envoy visited the agency and attempted to give a facetious award for beautifying the Australian countryside.

BUGAUP claims to have working within the advertising industry "double agents" who pass on secret intelligence about the strategies of million-dollar cigarette clients. Less fancifully, it also points to moral support from a range of doctors and other professionals in the field of community health.

One rebel GP in Sydney even joined the sprayers in the front line. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, who works in

the occupational health area with the Water Board, was arrested and fined for defacing a cigarette billboard. He appealed, arguing that he had committed a "crime of necessity," and the case was dropped.

Chesterfield-Evans keeps a high profile in the anti-smoking movement. A couple of months ago, he debated the issue of smoking and health on the ABC's National news program with a representative of the tobacco industry. In lighter moments at his home, a strict no-smoking zone, he will turn on one of those Dick Smith talking ashtrays which coughs and splutters, begging the smoker not to ash it to death.

"A lot of doctors are on our side, though they might not care to say so publicly," Partridge says. "It's just a difference of degree. They put 'please don't smoke' signs in their waiting rooms and we put our message where it hurts - on billboards."

The real winners of this confrontation are the big poster companies. As soon as the new poster for cigarettes or alcohol goes up in Sydney, at least, it usually is targeted by BUGAUP for action. When it is defaced it is replaced - and often hit again within 24 hours. So the battle goes on.

"The poster companies say we're vandals, but we help keep them in business," Lachlan argues. "Some billboards are sprayed continually and replaced over a period of years. This is how long it takes some advertisers to realise they're not winning. They don't like giving in without a fight."

The boot of Partridge's car is stocked with a psychedelic range of No Frills-type spray-cans bought in bulk. "We could never afford to do our job if we had to buy Dulux and Berger at normal prices," he said.

"I find chrome a very good colour when used with a black outline. It stands out at night as headlights hit it. I also carry cans of ordinary paint and a roller, plus a milk crate to stand on. This is the basic equipment of the true BUGAUP activist."

He chose the Lone Ranger image, with matching mask, to poke fun at the macho Marlboro Man, but he concedes that there is a touch of the western do-gooder in his philosophy.

"It's hard to say precisely how many people are in BUGAUP nationally. About 50 reliables in Sydney alone, I'd say, fewer in other capitals. You don't join BUGAUP and it has no formal membership or charter. It's a concept to subscribe to. I'm writing a book about our activities."

He'll have to find room for a chapter on his other graffiti exploits. Last Christmas and Easter, inspired by the comedy movie Ghostbusters, he unleashed Santabusters and Bunnybusters, to protest against the commercialisation of two holy festivals.

** BELOW: Lachlan in his slogan-daubed car.*

