

**THE MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING**

# *Miller's High Life Man Makes Room for the Girl in the Moon*

**By Stuart Elliott**

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MILLER BREWING, eager for a beer brand to relive the high life, is sending in a girl to do what had been a man's job.

The beer is of course Miller High Life, which since 1997 has been sold with a series of humorous commercials centered on a sardonic, sometimes crotchety advertising character who views the world from a distinctly male perspective. Beginning next week, the "High Life Man" campaign will give way to spots featuring a female figuratively and literally out of this world: the "Girl in the Moon" character who has symbolized High Life on packages, signs and ads since 1907, four years after the brand was introduced.

The moon maiden, believed to have been inspired by a Miller family daughter, granddaughter or goddaughter, is to be brought to life to narrate commercials that are 30, 60 and 90 seconds long, to be followed by online and retail ads. The spots, by the longtime High Life agency, Wieden & Kennedy, take a highly unusual tack for mainstream beer advertising, typically aimed at, if not the lowest common denominator, then perhaps the very next one up.

Rather than adopting a hard-sell approach dominated by frat-boy humor, patriotic paeans or sex appeal, the commercials are warm, emotional, at times almost elegiac, thanks to the character's throaty narration, backed by the haunting music of Erik Satie.

The soft sell also uses photographs on screen invoking the century-long heritage of High Life, saluting what the character calls "the moments we savor."

Those moments are occasions -- everyday, special or extraordinary -- ranging from a day at the beach or a visit to a bar to a World Series game or a moon shot.

The goal of the image campaign is to "build value back into this brand," said Tom McLoughlin, brand director for High Life at the Miller Brewing Company in Milwaukee, owned by SABMiller.

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High Life was once the Miller flagship brand, priced at what the industry calls the premium level along with rival beers like Budweiser. But after years of losing sales to Budweiser, sold by Anheuser-Busch, High Life was sent down a level in 1993 to what is known as subpremium pricing, competing against brands like Busch.

At first, High Life sales grew strongly at the lower price, but they recently began to fall again, although large sales gains for the light version of the brand have almost compensated for the decline.

"The 'High Life Man' worked well for a while, but he's run out of steam," said Benj Steinman, editor of Beer Marketer's Insights, an industry newsletter in Nanuet, N.Y. "They need this new advertising."

The idea is somewhat daring, to create what consumers are to perceive as premium advertising for a subpremium beer.

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"From an image standpoint, we do want to bring it up to higher-priced beer," said Susan Hoffman, creative director at Wieden & Kennedy in Portland, Ore.

The tenor of the campaign, its storytelling elements and its focus on a female character are meant to increase the number of women who buy High Life, Ms. Hoffman said, as well as the number of younger consumers of either sex who drink it.

While the "High Life Man" was primarily aimed at men ages 35 and up, the "Girl in the Moon" is intended to also resonate with men and women ages 21 to 34. They may not be as familiar with High Life as their fathers or grandfathers, but they are proving amenable to drinking brands like Pabst Blue Ribbon that compete against High Life. Such brands are finding new favor as part of a consumer trend called retro-chic.

The lunar lady fits nicely into that trend because she represents the history of High Life the way that Mr. Peanut symbolizes Planters or Buddy Lee stands for Lee jeans. Those two characters have been successfully brought back in ads aimed at younger consumers.

The "Girl in the Moon" has been pitching High Life since the last century, except for a hiatus from the late 1980's through the 1990's. She has looked the way she does since 1943, according to Miller archives, save for a minor makeover in 1998.

The campaign will start next Thursday during the season premiere of "Survivor" on CBS, when a 60-second version of the commercial is to run. The 90-second version will be viewable at [millerlightlife.com](http://millerlightlife.com), Mr. McLoughlin said, along with the nostalgic photographs featured in the spots.

Plans call for asking consumers to submit online "their own High Life moments," he added, "which maybe we could repurpose" into future commercials. Wieden & Kennedy is working on the interactive aspects of the campaign with Fullhouse Media in Milwaukee.

Miller spent \$23 million to advertise High Life and High Life Light in major media last year, according to TNS Media Intelligence, which tracks ad spending, compared with \$16.7 million in 2003 and \$19.6 million in 2002.

Spending for the first half of 2005 fell to \$5.4 million from \$6.7 million in the period a year ago, TNS said, perhaps in expectation of the departure of "High Life Man."

Miller, Mr. McLoughlin said, intends to increase the budget by 50 percent in the six months through March 2006, which is the end of the Miller fiscal year, "and next year it will be up 50 percent from this year."

In addition to the potential appeal to women and younger consumers, the commercials are almost sure to appeal to cinéastes because in using a female narrator, the music of Satie and nostalgic images, they are strongly reminiscent of the 1973 film "Badlands" by the director Terrence Malick.

After those similarities were described to Ms. Hoffman, she said: "Interesting. That's new news to me. We'll look into that."

In other words, "To the moon, journalist!"