

Carl's Jr. & Hardee's New Ad Campaign Brings Reality Television to Commercials

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Fake Restaurant Prank Proves Carl's Jr. & Hardee's Burgers are Fine-Dining Quality

After years of promoting the sit-down restaurant quality of its premium burgers, a new advertising campaign for Carl's Jr.(R) and Hardee's(R) takes that notion farther than it has ever been taken before. The fast-food burger chains' new campaign, called "Fake Restaurant," captures on hidden camera the true-life experience of customers who believed they were eating uber-expensive burgers at a fancy restaurant -- only to find out they were really enjoying Carl's Jr. and Hardee's burgers.

"In numerous reader polls and 'best burger' competitions around the country, Carl's Jr. Six Dollar Burgers(TM) and Hardee's Thickburgers(R) have often been rated as high, or higher, than those served at high-end sit-down restaurants," said Brad Haley, executive vice president of marketing, for Carl's Jr. and Hardee's. "So, to help prove the point, we created a fake, fancy restaurant to see if real people would happily pay the exorbitant prices on the menu for our burgers, and they did. The results, recorded via hidden cameras and microphones, have been edited into a new advertising campaign we are calling, aptly enough, 'Fake Restaurant.'"

From valet parking to white linen tablecloths, every aspect of the faux, fine-dining establishment, with the made-up name of Grade A Restaurant, was created for the experiment. The set was carefully constructed in Malibu, Calif. and included details expected as part of any high-end restaurant experience, including a framed profile of the fictional Chef Hooper and phony reviews at the entrance, as well as a Web site <http://www.grade-a-restaurant.com/> to help create a believable backstory.

Guests were brought to the Fake Restaurant set by an "accomplice," a friend who was in on the ruse, to experience a fine meal of specialty hamburgers from a top-notch chef. The charbroiled, 100% Black Angus beef burgers listed on the menu, which were the same burgers served at Carl's Jr. and Hardee's, ranged in price from \$14 dollars to \$20 dollars, with some menus listing no price at all. It wasn't until after the guests had paid the checks that the truth was revealed to them. Some were embarrassed, some were surprised, but none were dissatisfied with their purchase.

The series of television commercials showing real people eating real burgers at a fake restaurant, start airing today in Hardee's markets, and begin airing in Carl's Jr. markets beginning June 22. The commercials carry on a decade-long strategy at both brands to utilize innovative advertising intended to appeal to young, hungry guys. The ads were created by Los Angeles-based advertising agency, Mendelsohn|Zien, also the masterminds of many iconic Carl's Jr. and Hardee's ads including the memorable Paris Hilton commercial, "That's Hot," from 2005. The Fake Restaurant commercials were directed by FriedFish Productions, whose expertise in producing hidden-camera programming ranks them among the leaders in the reality television genre.

"This commercial shoot was a full-on reality television production. Our crew created everything from the menus to the restaurant decorations and held full-scale casting calls for improv actors to be the waitress, chef, even other patrons," said Jeff Fisher of FriedFish Productions. "We are taking their message of quality to the small screen as well. Most hidden-camera footage looks grainy and dark, but these ads are well-lit, stylish and have a film-like quality that we have all come to recognize as the Carl's Jr. and Hardee's commercial look."

Also premiering in the Fake Restaurant advertising is Hardee's new Prime Rib Thickburger(R), made with a 100% Black Angus beef patty, topped with sliced prime rib, horseradish sauce, and grilled onions, piled on a warm Ciabatta bun and served with a side of au jus. And while customers at Grade A were willing to pay through the roof for the delicious restaurant-quality Prime Rib Thickburger, Hardee's restaurants are now offering the choicest of their choice burgers for only \$4.49 a la carte or \$6.49 for a small combo. Prices may vary. Carl's Jr. will launch its own version, the Prime Rib Six Dollar Burger(TM), in June.

To see the commercials, meet the pranked participants and view additional footage from the Fake Restaurant commercial shoot, go to <http://www.fakerestaurant.com/>. The site also features longer "director's cut" versions of the commercials.

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