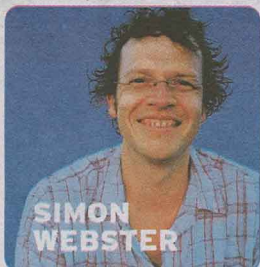


Chook ad ban a bit crook



SIMON WEBSTER

AN ADVERTISEMENT drawing attention to the suffering of factory-farmed chickens will not be posted on Sydney trains for fear of upsetting children, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported last week.

It is understood adverts depicting the conditions in which Sydney train travellers commute have similarly been banned from factory farms for fear of upsetting chickens.

Chooks are said to be grateful. Life is hard enough without having to look at graphic scenes aboard the 07.35 from Blacktown.

The Animal Liberation ad does not show any graphic pictures. It depicts a smiling, happy family in a kitchen, beneath which is a list of factory-farm practices, including chickens' beaks being sliced off with a red-hot blade. The tag line reads: "Caged eggs: can't you just taste the cruelty."

As well as breaking Australian Advertising Standards by not selling something expensive and useless, the ad was potentially upsetting for children, ruled APN Outdoor, the company that manages RailCorp's advertising.

RailCorp's young passengers are routinely protected from the evils of advertising by virtue of the fact that they can't see anything other than a forest of legs.

However, RailCorp could not rule out the possibility that in freak circumstances (say, a service running on time combined with an escalation of the swine flu epidemic), children could find themselves on a relatively empty



train, with advertising material in full view. They might then learn where eggs come from.

As most children have an affinity with animals, an innate sense of justice and the ability to pester their parents until they sink to their knees in a supermarket aisle and beg for mercy, this could theoretically lead to people buying eggs laid by chickens that have been treated well.

Perish the thought. Animal Liberation's communications officer, Lynda Stoner, was angry, the *Herald* reported.

"You can put anti-smoking ads with pus-filled lungs on the sides of buses but we have to be shielded from anything to do with the food we eat," she said.

Stoner said Animal Liberation had gone for a more subtle approach than usual with this campaign.

"We have shown very graphic images of battery hens in the past. But this time we wanted to get the message across without people turning away. We wanted to make

people think about what they're doing."

Even so, Animal Liberation had been told to "tone down the wording", Stoner said.

Yet this had blatantly not been the case in the approval of posters pointing out the dangers of ecstasy last week, the *Herald* pointed out. "In thermal meltdown, your body literally cooks from the inside, muscles liquefy and vital organs

12 million battery hens is the most compromised of any farm animal in the country, says the RSPCA.

Despite a Government-imposed increase in cage sizes last year – by a palatial 100 square centimetres per chook – hens still live up to five to a cage, each bird spending its short life on 550 square centimetres, less than an A4 piece of paper.

The birds cannot express their natural behaviour: they can't walk, spread their wings, preen, scratch, dust bathe or lay their eggs in a nest.

The egg industry is glad the Animal Liberation poster was banned. "It perpetuates a myth," said Jacqueline Baptista, communications manager of the Australian Egg Corporation. "Practices have changed."

For starters, the "smaller than an A4 piece of paper" is a myth, Baptista said. But unless *The Sun-Herald* ruler is wonky, she's wrong: 550 square centimetres really is smaller than an A4 piece of paper, which covers almost 624 square

centimetres. Beaks are trimmed not with knives but with lasers and infrared beams, Baptista said. Yet the RSPCA's scientific officer for farm animals, Melina Tensen, said blades were still used.

Practices are certainly changing overseas. Europe voted to ban battery farms in 1999, albeit in a slow, European, sipping-a-Cointreau kind of way: the ban doesn't come into effect until 2012.

As Australian governments put their heads under their wings and play dead as soon as anyone suggests such a move in this country, it is up to consumers to spend the day.

Our choice includes barn-laid eggs (better than cages), free-range (better still, though standards vary), and certified organic (hens are lightly stocked, eat organic feed and spend their days outside on pasture).

Potentially better still, backyard chooks are allowed all over Sydney and produce the freshest eggs of all.

Yet more than 90 per cent of eggs bought in Australia were laid in cages.

However unpalatable it might be, the truth might just set these chickens free.

In other news

Chinese health authorities are stopping restaurants serving chooks that have been bitten to death by poisonous snakes, Reuters reported last week.

A video showing a cook holding a snake and making it bite a chicken until the chicken died was recently widely circulated online. The dish supposedly has a detoxing effect on the diner.

"This at the very least is an irregular way of slaughtering poultry," a Chinese health official said in announcing the ban.

"Half your luck," says a spokeschook for Australian chickens. "Bitten to death by a snake? Luxury!"

Australian spas and health retreats can't believe they didn't think of it themselves.

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The truth might just set these chickens free.

collapse," read posters in Sydney railway stations.

However, it turned out this was a public health warning about the dangers of commuting on the Illawarra line.

The welfare of Australia's