

THE TAURINE WARS

Jon Monsoon ventures into the explosive world of competitive marketing at the table of the energy drink brands...

A jet-black-and-chrome V8 double cab slides to a dramatic asphalt halt outside the club. The tinted driver's-side window slides down and a tattooed forearm unfolds from the smoky depths. The bassline from that Cypress Hill song rolls out across the street. The neon teenagers making the pavement look hip gasp as the tattooed arm lobs frosted, black tins in their direction.

Suddenly, from the opposite end of the street, the sound of death metal approaches. A speeding white Tazz, mags spinning, guns it towards the black SUV and its children. "He who dies with the most toys is still dead," declares his window sticker.

The Tazz vrooms in and parks up close, bumper up against the chrome towbar of the black truck as energised kids leap for cover. Skinny ou in skinny jeans launches from the driver's seat. His T-shirt and sideways trucker cap bear the logo of rival brand HYPEster! Okes draw back; here comes kak!

The skinny dude flips a skull-ringed middle finger at the man-shape in the black bakkie. Tattooed arm returns the greeting with the universal backwards peace-sign.

"Fokkit bru!" squeaks the skinny ou at the V8 double cab, voice an octave too high. "This is our gig!" The hulk revs the bakkie to life, lobbing some cans of brand MALster! into the crowd of squealing kids. Like ice-cool lumo handgrenades.



IN THIS ERA WHERE BRANDS RULE BANDS, THE TAURINE ARMIES HAVE ALSO TAKEN TO CONSCRIPTING MUSICAL ACTS AS FRONTLINE CAVALRY

Martinengo had mortally offended the Vettel Supporters Club

The skinny Product Activator grabs his branded tees, badges and stickers from the back seat of his company Tazz and strides off down the pavement into the club. Lord of all he surveys...

Two weeks later, things get heated at the outdoor X-treme sports event, as rival energy-drink reps clash over stall space. Okes have words over who controls the sound rig. At a tattoo show, things get really childish, as cats start dropping rival product off next to competitor displays. Enemy agents are bombing stickers over opposition stickers.

When backs are turned, cases of "unauthorized" buzz juice materialise from nowhere to flout sponsor restrictions...

It's corporate war! But when it comes to the energy-drinks biz, this is more than just carbonated caffeine we're talking about.

In an era where brands rule bands, the Taurine armies have also taken to conscripting musical acts as frontline cavalry. Sponsored bands drip head-to-toe with branded accessories like walking billboards, promoting an industry reportedly worth R680 million a year.

Energy drink activators are out there 24/7, flogging lifestyle from a can to the joller on the street. But for the more ambitious, anyone with talent and the basic thirst to succeed could become a surf/skate/rock/pimp /champ. Just ask Kyle Loza, Schumi, Rossi, Ken Block, Dane Reynolds, or, if he were still alive, surfing hero Andy Irons.

If there's one thing the energy-drinks giants can agree on, it's that sportsmen, bands and babes are the hallowed vehicles that speak to the target market – and as a result, they're not afraid to throw monstrous budgets behind a name or an image. If the target demographic (males aged 18-30) is to be acquired, who dares wins. Certainly, the size of your branded, tricked-out 4x4 is also a factor.

Otherwise, nothing stands in the way of these brands and their rands; except, maybe, each other.

Can in the hand, baby! **FHM**

FACT BOX!

Break out a can of whup-ass on ignorance...



Red Bull was the world's first energy drink – launched commercially in Austria in 1987.

More than 500 new energy drink brands were launched worldwide in 2006.

In 2009, 80 per cent of energy drink drinkers in SA were black.*

Energy drinks do not burn calories.

In 2009, 22 per cent of Red Bull drinkers were English-speaking.**

In 2009, the most energy drinks were consumed by soccer players (the least by rugby players). The second-most by pool players!

In South Africa, Coca-Cola's energy product Power Play leads the energy drinks market.

In the US, Red Bull leads the market by a large percentage, followed by the proudly South African-owned Monster and then Rockstar.

Mixing energy drinks with alcohol can mask how intoxicated you are.

*as quoted by Analytix' Energy Drinks Report 2010

**source: AMPS 2009