

# Sexy Does It

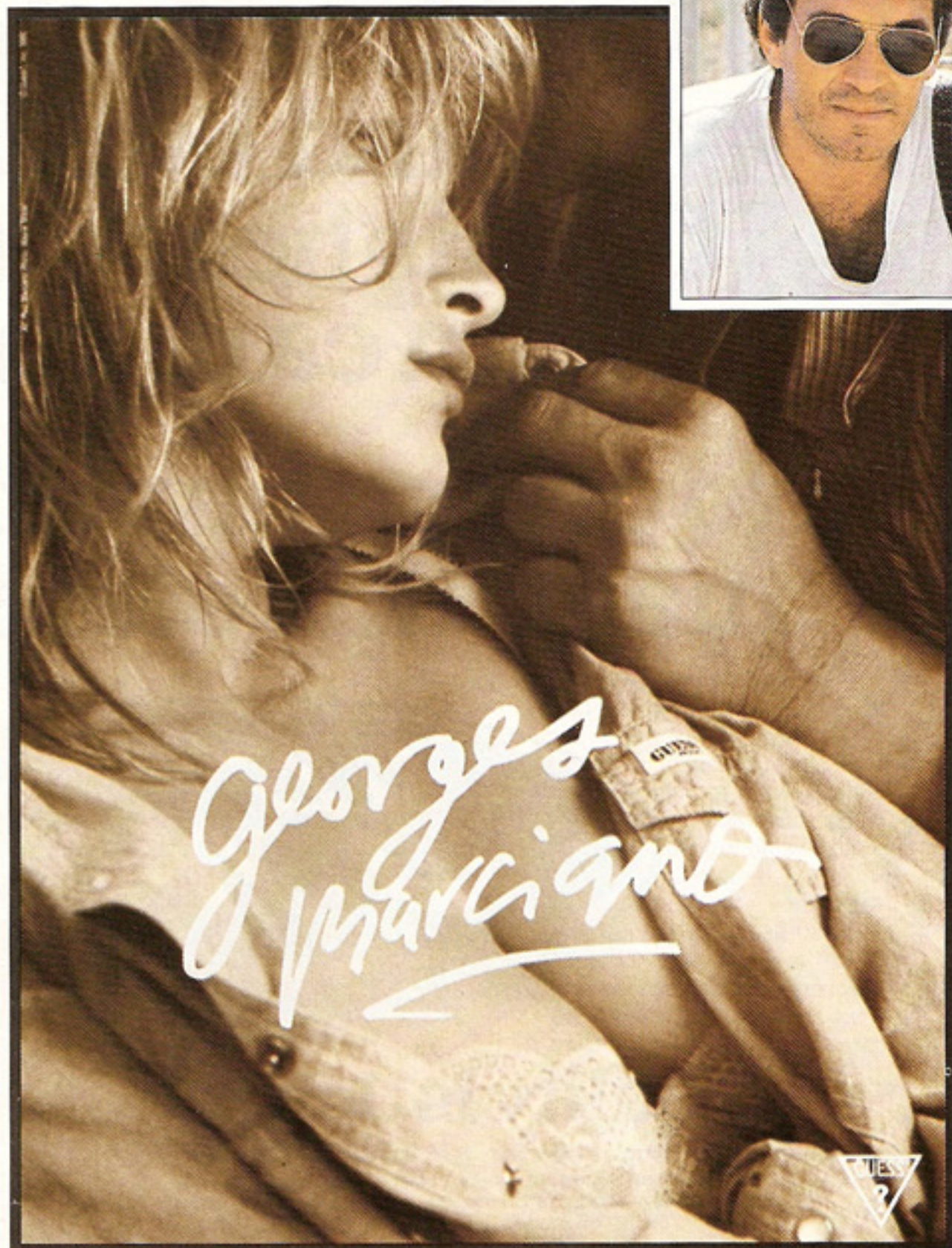
High-voltage ads anger some but boost sales



**Cave man style:** *Guess's daring pitch*

**A**tousled blond beauty stands in the corner of a cattle pen, one finger caught between her lips, her denim bodice unbuttoned. In the next photograph she is lying down, and a man's hand is opening her shirt to reveal ample cleavage. In another shot she is dancing with a cowboy, her jean skirt ripped and her bra exposed. The jumbled black-and-white photo montage—part of a series of print-advertising campaigns for Guess fashions—is one of the latest entries in the fashion industry's era of provocation. Jeans companies are risking public ire and creating the most suggestive advertisements in haberdashery history; in fact, fashion ads today are far more controversial than fashions. The ad campaigns have numerous detractors, particularly religious and women's groups, that claim the ads are promoting violence and promiscuity. But teenagers don't seem too concerned about that; they love the high-voltage messages, which are a big hit for the clothing, perfume and cosmetics industries.

All that really matters to Paul Marciano, cofounder and ad director of Guess, is that people remember his ads. It takes a while to



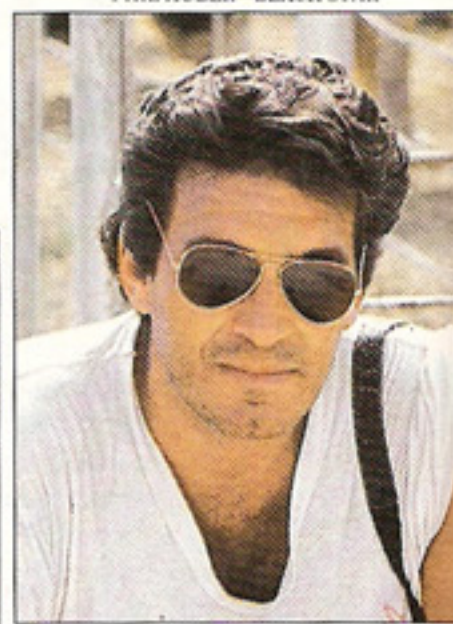
**Ample cleavage:** *Guess's highly suggestive campaign, photographer Maser*

unravel the meaning of Guess's multiple-page layouts; the strategy, of course, is that while the consumer studies the picture, the designer's name melts into the brain. "People become immune to the familiar," says Milton Glaser, a leading graphic designer. "Given the competition in advertising, companies are pressed to the extreme. Ads are sexually explicit now because consumers are bored."

Among designers, no one understood the Madison Avenue dictum that "sex sells" better than Calvin Klein, who helped kick

off the designer-jeans craze in 1980 with a TV ad that scandalized many people. A provocative Brooke Shields teased, "Do you want to know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing." But it is photographer Bruce Weber's steamy magazine ads that have become Calvin Klein's trademark. Weber, 40, has photographed most of Klein's print ads—including the notorious inky Obsession ads showing a tangle of bare bodies—for the last eight years. "Weber's ads for Klein broke the mold," says George Lois, chairman of Lois Pitts Gershon Pon

PHIL HUBER—BLACK STAR



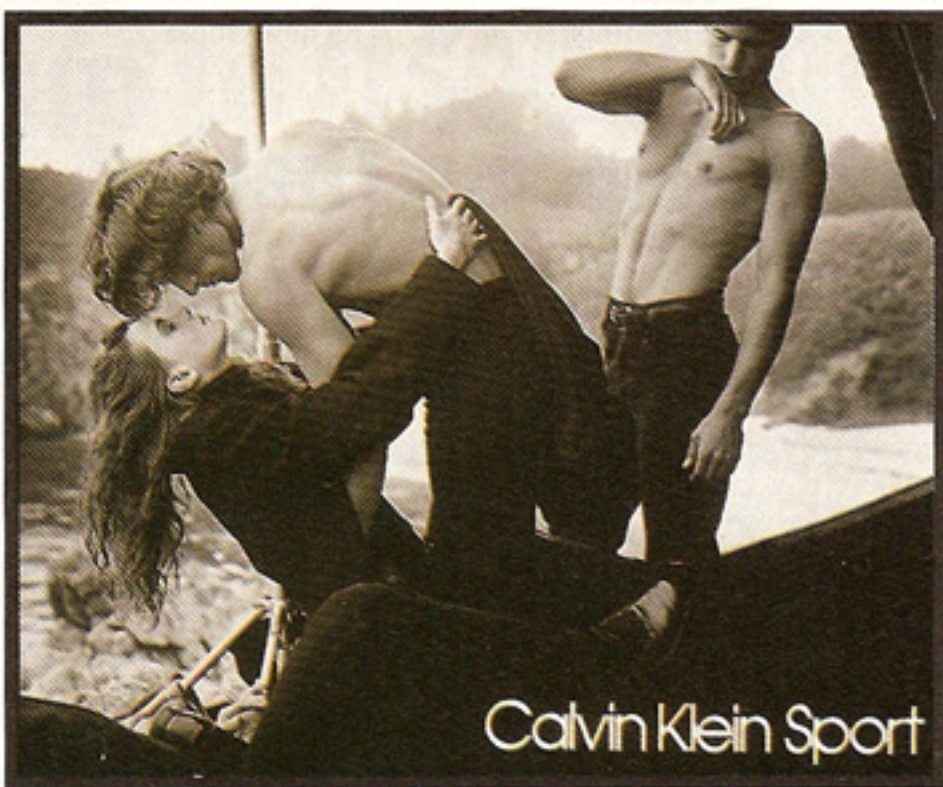
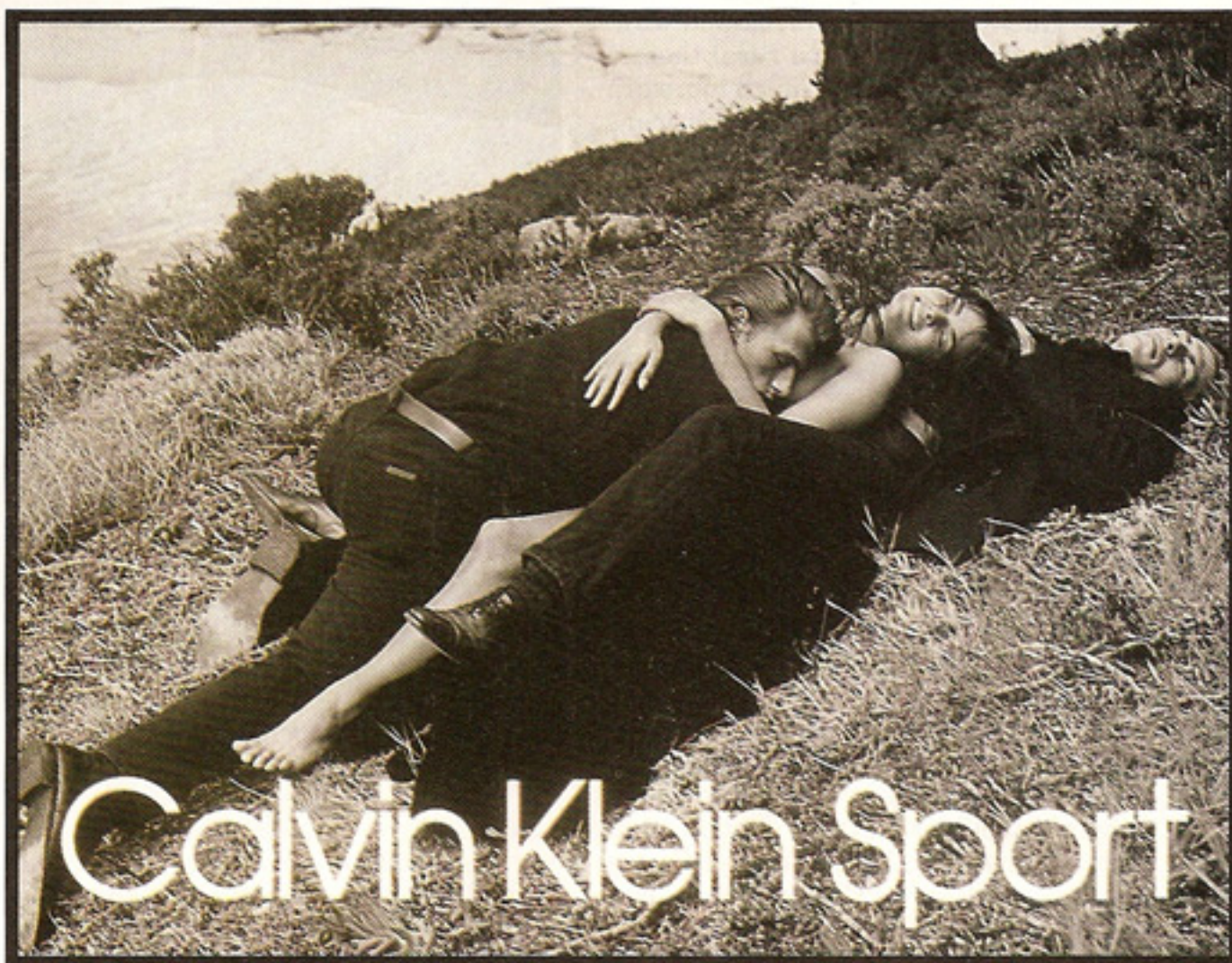


advertising agency. "For years fashion photography was just elegant young women in front of the Plaza. Weber's ads shook everybody up. It was exciting stuff—obviously appealing to homosexuals, but also titillating to women."

**Tyrannical control:** Weber's striking, highly recognizable style has made him one of the most sought after fashion photographers—commanding a day rate estimated between \$10,000 and \$20,000—and placed him in the ranks of pre-eminent photographers such as Richard Avedon and Helmut Newton. Weber has done what Avedon did in the '60s—he has profoundly changed how commercial photography presents fashion. Weber exercises tyrannical control over his ad campaigns. He popularized the use of outdoor photography for fashion shoots, using natural light and fresh-faced models. His pictures are awash in the golden light of sunset; the models have a slightly dazed look, since Weber insists they stare straight into the sun. "When Ralph [Lauren] and Calvin did these campaigns, they took enormous chances and spent a lot of money doing something they believed in," says Weber. "Sometimes we shoot clothes and sometimes just beautiful pictures. There isn't that feeling that every photo has to sell something."

The glossy erotic fantasies are staggeringly expensive. A 28-page portfolio ad in the September *Vogue* cost Klein more than \$700,000. According to Michael Calman, ad director for Calvin Klein, the company will spend more than \$25 million advertising Klein's fashions, as well as its underwear and fragrance licensees. The money is hardly spent in vain: according to a survey of outstanding ads by Video Storyboard Tests, an ad-research firm, Calvin Klein supplanted Marlboro as the No. 1 print ad in 1985 and is now far ahead of the advertising clutter. "The Marlboro man took 25 years to create, and Klein did it in just 4 years," says president Dave Vadehra.

In Weber's ads, less is more. There is no obvious selling. The situations are far more intriguing than the clothes—his latest series for Calvin Klein sportswear features two women embracing and another showing a woman with two topless men. "I think a lot of people are embarrassed at what they think they see," says Weber. "They get upset because the pictures strike a strange chord. They are seductive, a little controversial." The brilliant stroke in Weber's nonadvertising is that he creates a memorable image for Klein, even though he's only selling jeans—which, let's face it, are hardly distinguishable from the dozens



**Weber's steamy style:** In his ads the situations are more intriguing than the clothes, the photographer sporting his traditional bandanna



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of other brands of jeans on the market. "The ads are tremendously successful," says Calman. "Calvin Klein jeans is one of the leading brands, ranked right behind Lee-Wrangler's and Levi's in terms of total volume." Because of the almost mythic image Weber's ads have created for Klein, other sportswear manufacturers have begun running similar ads. "Everybody is copying Weber," says Lois. "But Marciano [of Guess] is doing a bad copy. His ads have to be more explicit because the genre is already old hat."

As far as consumers are concerned, Guess is making a perfect pitch. While the

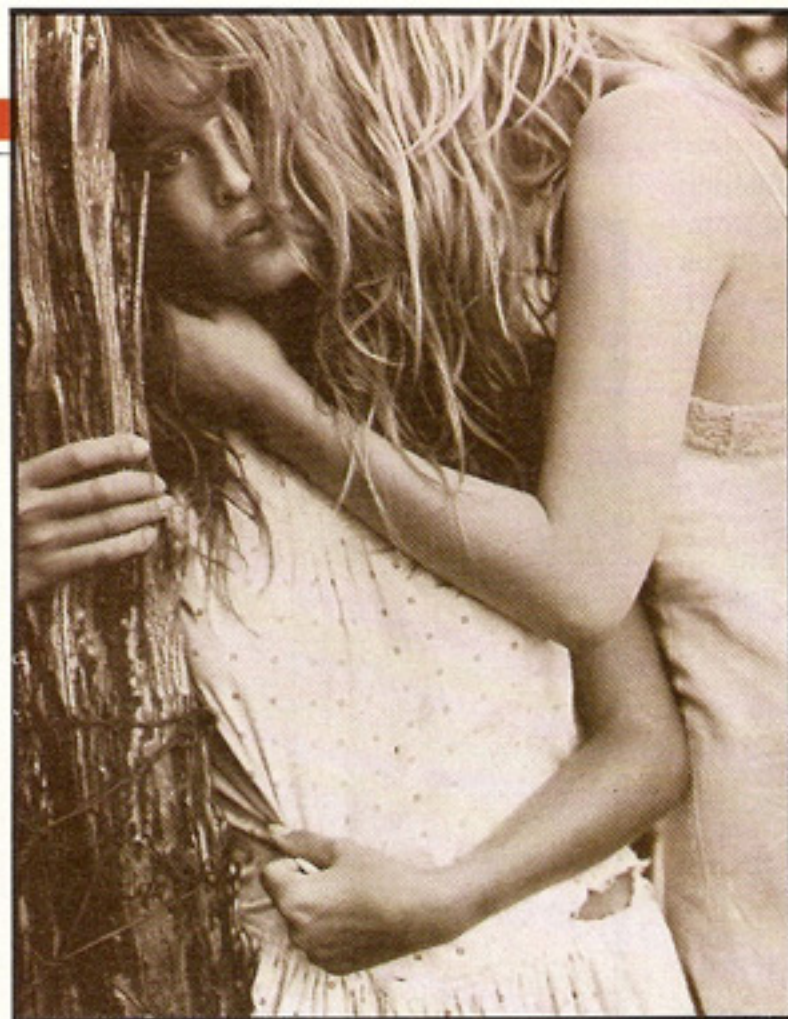
high-priced status-jeans market is crowded with new offerings from Esprit, Et Vous, No!, In Wear and others, "no one is approaching the Guess phenomenon," says Joan Kaner, vice president and fashion director of women's ready-to-wear at Macy's. "Anything from Guess is just blowing out of the store." This year Guess spent \$10 million on advertising to guarantee that its form-fitting \$60 beat-up jeans remain the *de rigueur* garment for young trendies. With an estimated \$85 million in wholesale business in 1985, and an expected \$220 million this year, the five-year-old Guess company is



the hottest new jeans maker around.

The Guess ads, shot in black and white and featuring Western and rural themes, are intended to portray a much more dramatic, realistic view of young Americans. "Weber and I are trying to reach the same market," says 39-year-old Wayne Maser, the *Vogue* fashion photographer who shoots the Guess ads. "But I try to depict life as a teenager, their desires, needs and dreams. I start with only a rough idea of what I have in mind. After I'm finished, I start laying the pictures out and create a certain story. I don't set out to make sexy pictures." Marciano defends Maser against those who accuse him of being a Weber knockoff. "Weber never went to torn clothes, models with no makeup and their hair not done," he says. "I don't think we were wrong. All over Europe and the United States, people have talked about these pictures."

**Setup scenes:** One reason for the talk is that sometimes the ads look too realistic: one spread depicting a woman hoisted over a man's shoulder next to a photograph showing them together in a car "caused an uproar," says Maser. "People thought it was a rape scene. But the pictures were shot on separate days." While Maser's camera was only recording setup scenes, his juxtaposition of photographs insinuates a



**'Romance and friendship'? Marciano's new shocker**

sexual encounter. Marciano is not concerned about the controversy. "We are putting the reality down on the pages," he says. "It's about sensuality and relationships between girls and guys. Some people think of things we do not." The new Guess

troverial in these ads," says Xavier Moreau, a French fashion agent who works on both continents. "Besides, you can't ask people to spend money on clothes that aren't seductive."

JENNET CONANT

## Selling Jeans by Ignoring Them

Once again Jordache is offending the denim-monde. Its new TV commercials feature a pubescent redhead and dialogue of such compelling strangeness that they look and sound like an MTV video gone astray. In one 30-second spot, a Molly Ringwald look-alike whines, "I hate my mother, she's so much prettier than I am." An earnestly ardent cohort responds, "I'm hoping she'll be divorced before I'm

out of school." There'd be no way to tell it was a jeans commercial if it wasn't so dumb.

Jeans have reached the rarefied strata of Coke and Pepsi, where it is taken for granted that the product is desirable, and all an ad has to do is remind the consumer of a brand name. As a result, the ad campaigns on TV have tended to be as puzzling and infuriating as possible. Calvin Klein pioneered this art form a few years back when he started selling jeans by ignoring them. His ground-breaking TV spots starred five different young models babbling about horses, babies and husbands—everything but blue jeans. Jordache is following the ignoble tradition with a series of commercials focused on teenagers talking about their ugly-duckling stage, their awkward first attempts at romance and even about

seeing their parents naked.

This isn't the first time Jordache has added sex to the advertising formula. A 1980 series of tantalizing commercials that featured children was pulled after a short run because of an outpouring of public wrath. "Jeans are by nature a tight-fitting product," explains Jerry Taylor, vice president of advertising and public relations for Jordache. "There is nothing more attractive than a young body in a beautiful pair of jeans." Four upcoming Jordache spots, to begin production next week, will "broaden the campaign, not soften it," says Taylor. "It's slice-of-life advertising, only they're showing the slice that hasn't been allowed on family television," says Malcolm MacDougal, president of Hill, Holliday advertising agency. "If they're winning new custom-

ers and getting away with it, God bless them."

Not everyone shares MacDougal's laissez-faire attitude. The Jordache ad about parental nudity—featuring one kid asking another, "Have you ever seen your parents naked?"—was refused by all three networks. "It was a matter of questionable taste," summed up an NBC spokesman. Jordache is also drawing angry calls from parents and women's groups who are accusing them of selling jail bait and not jeans. "These aren't teenagers making this up," says Evelina Kane, staff coordinator of Women Against Pornography. "These are fantasies of adult men who own advertising companies." Despite—or because—of the controversy, the jeans are selling. Since the television ads aired in June, sales are up 35 percent. Says Jordache's Taylor, "If parents reacted positively to these ads, I'd be in trouble."

JENNET CONANT with JESSICA KREIMERMAN in New York



**Infuriating:** Jordache on TV