

\ 108

**THE METAL-CLAD
ROBOT**

The Datsun name change campaign encouraged me to call on Chris Churchill, seeking his help to come up with a campaign idea for our new client: Varta consumer batteries. The brand was German, but the client was Athens-based since Greece had provided a package of incentives to international companies for settling there. At that time, the GCC markets were dominated by Duracell and Eveready batteries. Lebanon was different since Ray-O-Vac had been famous since the late Sixties. Much of that brand's popularity stemmed from a memorable TV campaign created by the well-known producer Sylvio Tabet.

Varta had to create a place for itself by beating Duracell's rabbit and Ray-O-Vac's "شو بطريتك؟!" shedding the image of its better-known sister, the car battery. Chris Churchill underlined two words in the creative brief that we received during our first session with the client. Varta batteries did not leak because they were metal-clad inside the cell. Soon he started sketching a robot walking, jumping, and beating its chest on a large drawing pad. As with the 260Z model cars, he ordered a Hamburg production studio to produce a robot's dress as per his drawing. He also asked them to begin casting for a petite ballerina who was graceful and could fit into the robot's dress. The client flew in from Athens, I flew in from Beirut, and Chris and Youssef Habbab flew in from Kuwait. We had the pre-production meeting at the studio, where a spacious filming plateau was balanced on a pulley with strong ropes stretched across the ceiling. These ropes would allow our robot to fly down from an elevated platform across the entire hall.

We met our heroine – the tiny ballerina – who seemed to be elated with the role she was about to play. She put on the robot's outfit and began jumping and moving around while the tall German director coached her and took Polaroid shots to show her how she looked.

We retired early to our hotel, abstaining from the Reeperbahn's pleasures, as we needed to be back at the studio early the next morning. Chris had planned a one-day shoot, explaining to the client that he had done this to cut down on the production cost. The ballerina was superb. She repeated the long shot – which formed the backbone of the commercial – many, many times. Dressed like a robot and moving like one, she went up to the elevated platform and jumped in the air with open arms and caught the two handles of the pulley. The filming was done against a blue wall, and she slid down the rope with her legs stretched in a Swan Lake-style jump until she landed close to the camera at the other end of the room. Then she stopped, stretched, and banged her two hands on her chest. Later, we learnt that Chris and the director had spent hours experimenting until they both agreed on the sound effect that would accompany the chest-beating scene.

For the client and all of us at Intermarkets, this TV commercial was a matter of great pride. More important was the fact that Varta's metal-clad robot scared away the rabbits and secured an impressive market share for the battery in year one.