

SUPERHUMAN EFFORT TO BRING PARALYMPIC GAMES OUT OF THE SHADOW OF ITS SISTER GAMES



In this Olympics season, with the globe's greatest sporting event just around the corner, it would be forgiven to believe that every sporting commercial will be about the mega-event. However, it turns out that this summer's outstanding and simply exceptional commercial is not for the Olympics, but for the Paralympic Games. The Summer Paralympic Games are a major international event, followed immediately by the summer Olympics where all the competitors have a physical disability; this includes athletes with mobility disabilities, amputations, the blind and those with cerebral palsy. The 90-second promotional spot for Channel 4's coverage of the Paralympics, to be held in London from August 29 to September 9 is powerful in its storytelling and is directed with skill and dexterity. Directed by Tom Tagholm the ad uses brilliant immersive camerawork, that makes you virtually feel that you are there, so engrossed you are in the visuals. The loud soundtrack of Public Enemy's "Harder Than You Think" that exhorts the competitors to, "Throw your hands in the air," "Get up show no fear," "Get up if you all really care," contribute to create a compelling atmosphere of free-for-all yet fiercely competitive, confidence and boldness, companionship and amity, success and elation. Much of the action images in the ad are filmed at Paralympic test events. However, towards the hallway stage in the ad, the footage shifts from the track and field, from the gymnasium and from the swimming pool to a war zone, with crackling gunfire and exploding bombs; a highway where a car is shown turning turtle, to a hospital where an expectant mother holds her extended stomach and scowls- this is how these athletes became disabled, this is the story of their genesis. This is how they got their handicaps and the Paralympics are a place where these people, unfortunate victims of unforeseen, unplanned for live altering events, vanquish their physical challenges – the tagline for the spot says it all, it says, "Meet the Superhumans." The director Tagholm said, "We really didn't want to shoot around the particular physical attributes of these athletes and their disabilities. We wanted to absolutely embrace all of that—their stance, the ways they've adapted to their sport, the ways that they use their bodies. It's very much 'Here we are!' y'know? There's no tiptoeing around anything." He said that the ad was a huge challenge. I did not want the flashback scenes to be sentimental. "One thing that we weren't interested at all in doing was an advert which said 'Isn't it great that these guys have made it to the start line?' Dan Brooke Channel 4's marketing and communications chief, would not tell how much the ad cost but is confident that the station's commitment will pay off. "We want people to reassess what they thought the Paralympics is," he says. "It's not an afterthought but an event in its own right. Competitors in the Paralympics have often complained that they have not got their due and are not in the spotlight than their illustrious and celebrated Olympic counterparts, even though their success is equally hard earned. Jody Cundy an amputee track cyclist training for his fifth Games, has won five gold medals and says that in spite of his achievements very few have heard of him. "You knew how much work goes into winning medals, but it didn't seem to be conveyed to the public," says Cundy. "You watched Olympians become household names and thought, 'Well, I've done pretty much the same, but without the credit.'" Raving effusively about the spot he said, "all of a sudden we're cool. The build-up alone is bigger than the coverage we usually get. It's pretty special".