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And for Years, People Have Said They Buy Coal Age for the Articles

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To the management of Midwest Corp., a Charleston, W.Va.-based supplier of steel railroad track, the company's new ad campaign is "an eye catcher" aimed at pumping up business and lending its product an aura of strength and beauty.

To Kathy Bonk at the National Organization for Women, "it's a rollback to the cave-man age."

Eye of the Beholder

The difference lies in how the two sides view the campaign's subject: a champion body builder and Raquel Welch look-alike named Marjo Selin. These days, a swimsuit-clad Mrs. Selin can be seen flexing her delts and quads next to three steel rails in Midwest advertisements placed in *Railway Track and Structures*, *Coal Age* and *Modern Railroads* magazines.

"Clearly, they're selling the woman's body, not the product," says Ms. Bonk, who heads a NOW research project that seeks to improve the media's portrayal of women. "At least in a Maidenform (bra) ad, you have a connection between a semi-nude figure and a woman buying a bra."

Jerry Thompson, Midwest's president, denies that the ads are in any way meant as cheesecake. "We were careful not to do something that was demeaning to the female," he says.

While company officials say it's too early to gauge the campaign's impact on sales, they're encouraged by responses to the ads, which offer both a selection of businesslike brochures and a calendar featuring Mrs. Selin. Over the past four weeks, more than 120 replies have been received—all of them including a request for the calendar.

Midwest executives say, too, that at the annual railroad engineers convention held recently in Chicago, hundreds of guests muscled their way to the company's booth to talk steel rail—and watch Mrs. Selin, again attired in a bathing suit, flex and give exercise tips.

Deductive Reasoning

"If she was dressed like she was in that ad, I bet it was the busiest booth," fumes Ms. Bonk, who favors the campaign's derailment.

Rochelle Larkin, however, sees no reason for complaint. "I think it's a tremendous step forward for an advertiser to use a woman as a symbol of strength," says the editor of *Female Bodybuilding* magazine.

"Besides, I don't think anyone will have picked up a copy of *Modern Railroads* for prurient purposes," Ms. Larkin continues. "Of course, I don't know all these railroad executives."