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of The Sentinel Staff**

The sarcasm of the little girl in pigtails was unmistakable.

"Give me a break," she said. "Who ever bought anything and then got paid for buying it? That's like taking the money out of one pocket and putting it into another.

"We fifth-graders have a name for people who believe that: 'dip-wad.'"

The TV commercial was one of 18 developed for R.C. Hill Hyundai, a car dealership in Orlando. The commercials used personal testimonials from "ordinary" people to drive home a point: Don't get taken for a ride by misleading auto advertising and sales gimmicks.

As Central Florida auto dealers try to clean up the industry's advertising by setting up a new code of ethics, several dealers are developing ads that expose other dealers' gimmicks and tricky sales tactics.

Most of the ads, which appear mainly on television, attack the tools of the trade -- asterisks, cash-back deals, giveaways, triple rebates, for example -- sometimes making fun of them, almost always warning consumers to avoid them. Few of the word-for-the-wise ads appear in the newspaper, although one newspaper ad, for Fairway Chrysler Plymouth in Orlando, tells customers, "It's your money. Spend it wisely!"

Advertising experts say the ads are dealers' attempts to distinguish themselves from competitors.

Edward Forrest, an advertising professor at Florida State University in Tallahassee, said he has not seen the ads but is familiar with the use of advertising tactics that undercut competitors' attention-getting ploys.

"They can't out-compete their competitors' gimmicks,

so now they're trying to sell the truth," he said.

Dealers say their motive is noble: to educate the consumer about the cheap tricks in car sales.

"We have an obligation to the consumer to bring these things to their attention," said Sonny King, owner of Sonny King's Orange Buick in Orlando. The ads vary in style and expense, from the blunt promise of "no bull prices" by Russell Pontiac Buick GMC Truck Inc. in Kissimmee to the more subtle humor of Sonny King's, which feature an impersonator of Andy Rooney, the 60 Minutes commentator, who always begins with, "Do you ever wonder . . . ?"

The campaigns are unusual in auto advertising because they signal a shift from emphasizing the price of cars to attacking competitors' strategies, said Joe Pisani, a University of Florida professor of advertising.

For instance, the Andy Rooney character, played by New York actor Michael T. Kelly, warns in one commercial about a widespread practice among dealers of adding the costs of dealer-installed options on a second sticker.

"A second sticker is a sucker sticker," he concludes. Sonny King, owner of the dealership, said his company's ad campaign is in its early stages, but so far the first ad, which ran during a 60 Minutes episode, has brought positive reactions from consumers. Several other dealers who have produced similar consumer-awareness ads say they also have experienced good results.

An exception is R.C. Hill Hyundai.

R.C. Hill's personal testimonials were pulled after running in July when sales during that month, usually one of the dealership's best, nose-dived, said Mandy Alonso, senior vice president.