



Product Placement Is In Overdrive

Josef Adalian, 06.01.05, 6:00 PM ET

Forget about Carrie and Bo: The real star of last week's *American Idol* finale was **Ford Motor**.

The automaker is one of the Fox show's sponsors, and, along with **Coca-Cola** (nyse: [KO](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) and **Cingular Wireless**, its products are regularly featured. But the finale took things to another level altogether.

An extended montage featured highlights from the music video/ads *Idol* airs each week, in which the finalists prance around driving a Ford. In a sketch lampooning ABC's *PrimeTime Live*, there was an extreme close-up of a Ford logo.

And then, just before **Carrie Underwood** was crowned winner, host **Ryan Seacrest** told her and rival **Bo Bice** they'd both just won Ford Mustang convertibles.

The Ford, er, focus was no surprise to readers of *Stay Free* magazine. Earlier last month, it reprinted an internal Ford memo in which the carmaker detailed its many planned product placements.

In addition to *Idol*, Ford products were featured in sweeps episodes of *Extreme Makeover*, *Total Request Live* and even the lineup of tiny cable network Gospel Music Channel.

"These vehicle integrations into highly rated TV shows will help us create a more meaningful connection with our consumers," the memo gushed.

Not impressed: U.S. Federal Communications Commissioner **Jonathan Adelstein**, who has stepped up his crusade against hidden pitches in the media and late last month called for a probe.

"Failure to disclose who is behind sponsored programming violates the law," he said.

Adelstein made it clear there's "nothing inherently wrong" with product placement, but he wants broadcasters to provide "clear and prominent" disclosure when it happens.

It is unlikely Fox, owned by **News Corp.** (nyse: [NWS](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)), or Ford has anything to worry about. *Idol* mentions at the end of each broadcast that companies like Ford and Coke have provided "promotional consideration."