

# Taking on trade seriously

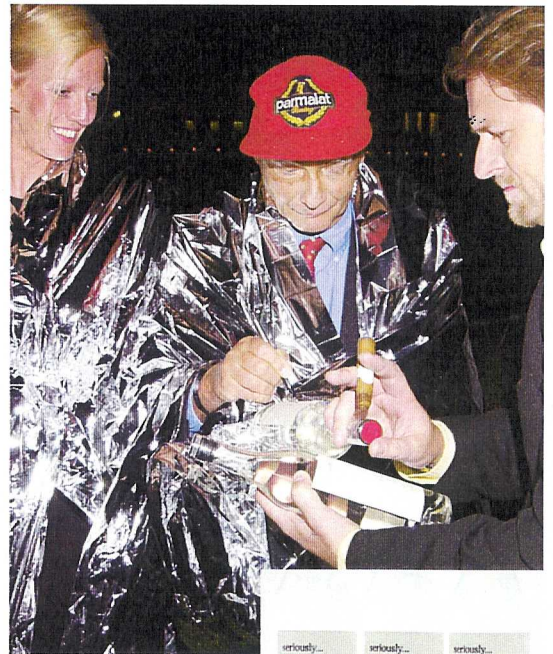
Things may have been slow for seriously... vodka in the final quarter last year, but the brand has got off to a flying start in 2003, which was a nice surprise for producers Facile & Co. Indeed orders have been up throughout January.

"It's mostly through the London on-trade, and the switch from channel marketing to dealing with wholesalers has broadened out our volume base," said James Robertson managing director Facile & Co.

Until recently, the brand's on-trade strength has been in the UK's urban style bars, but this is now expanding to take in the growing phenomenon of 'gastro pubs', as well as upmarket bars and pubs under the control of the large pub chains. The brand is maintaining a consistency of approach in its dealings with this sector: "We're taking the lessons we've learnt in the independent off trade into the arena of wider volumes", according to Robertson.

While the UK remains the centre of the brand's universe, it also launched last September in Australia. Robertson told *Drinks International* that a huge response at an Aussie trade show had seen the brand debut in the Melbourne and then Sydney bar scenes.

A flavoured line extension, seriously... Pinky launched in 2002, and Robertson is satisfied with its progress thus far, though it accounts for a very small proportion of total sales. A new flavour is apparently on the cards some time in 2003. When asked whether a premiss was likely, Robertson was forthright: "Heaven forbid." Citing the potential damage to a core vodka brand inherent in the launch of a premiss,



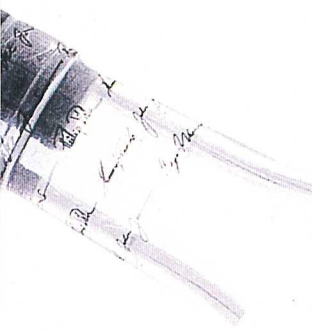
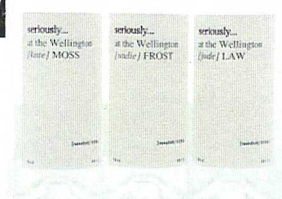
Robertson said: "Only one (vodka) company has got it right, so looking at the statistics I think we'll pass on that for now."

Marketing of the brand remains fairly tightly focused. Targeting bartenders, the brand website runs a cocktail of the month section offering prizes and promotion of the winning concoction, with the name of the bartender and his or her bar up in lights. In terms of wider promotion, progress in the off trade is likely to determine the level of investment in the offing.

Robertson said that year three of the brand's progress, currently upon us, was always earmarked as one crucial to development in the off trade arena. Negotiations are underway at the time of writing to expand sales beyond the current limited number of outlets, though a move into the major multiples would not suit the brand profile and remains highly unlikely for now.

Robertson was sanguine about the current state of the, highly developed, UK vodka market, believing that mainstream premium launches should be carefully targeted. While there is always room for niche, ultra-premium launches: "To sell a \$1,000 bottle of vodka once is an achievement, twice presents a challenge, and three times is nearly impossible."

**'We're taking the lessons we've learnt in the off trade into the arena of wider volumes?'**



It may have been a slow end to 2002, but seriously...has got off to a flier in the New Year. The company attributes this to a switch from channel marketing to dealing with wholesalers. Now a new flavour is on the launch pad