EUROPEAN COMMERCIALS (Color) (Europe, 1958, 2 reels)

Although somewhat outside the scope of the 1927-28-29 category of the bulk of tonight's program, these commercials, in our hands only for a few days, seemed far too good to pass up. Raviously and imaginatively produced, with abstract and experimental conceptions that put to shame most of the deliberately avant-garde films along the same lines, they are so far ahead of the traditional "hard-sell" American commercials that it is almost frightening. Of particular appeal are some French commercials - blunt, yet somehow delicate - dealing with deodorants; another one parades naked egg yolks much as Berkeley paraded his chorus girls at Warners, complete with the overhead patterns.

GADGETS GALORE (Warner Brothers, 1955) Produced and written by Robert G. Youngson; one reel.

The gimmicky title, presumably selected to suggest that it was a follow-up to the Academy-Award winning "This Mechanical Age," actually rather under-sells this charming little film, which for most of its footage is a compact little history of the coming of the auto. Most of the footage in the early section is culled from the 1927 Warner film "The First Auto," directed by Roy Del Ruth, and Charles E. Mack, Russell Simpson and Frank Campeau are easily recognizable in many scenes. For the rest, there's some fascinating newreel footage of the teens and twenties, and a glimpse of Barney Oldfield in action, climaxed by a few of the off-beat autos that justify the film's title.

THE FINISHING TOUCH (Hal Roach-MGM, 1927/28) Directed by Clyde Bruckman; supervised by Leo McCarey; photographed by George Stevens; Starring Stan Laurel & Oliver Hardy, with Edgar Kennedy. Two reels.

A freshly available Laurel & Hardy from the twenties, unseen almost since that time, is such a rarity and such a welcome event that we won't spoil any of your fun by discussing the film, or its gags, in detail. Suffice it to say that while it's not up to the very top standards ("Big Business", "Putting Pants on Philip", "Two Tars") it's certainly well above even the high average standard of films like "Leave 'Em Laughing", "You're Darn Tootin" and "We Faw Down". Full of splendid slapstick, it also has something of the dream-like quality of the Keaton films too. Quite certainly it's the best of the few that Clyde Bruckman directed the boys in. Once in a while, one feels that a gag has not been properly exploited; but wait ... there's always a reason for leaving a gag apparently half-done, and the boys invariably follow through with a better payoff than the one expected. This is especially true of the climax. Needless to say, there is the traditional exchange of savagery, but this time with a difference -- the hapless victim for once does just stand there like a gentleman, but lets his wrath get sufficiently out of control to hit back. It makes a pleasant change of pace in a film that is full of invention, horribly painful sight gags, and carefully planned, methodical slapstick.

- INTERMISSION -

"THE SATURDAY NIGHT KID" (Paramount, 1929) Directed by Edward Sutherland; based on a play by George Abbott & John V. A. Weaver; adaptation and dialogue by Lloyd Corrigan and Edward E. Pamore jr.; screenplay by Ethel Doherty; photography by Harry Fischbeck. 7 reels.
Starring Clara Bow, with James Hall, Jean Arthur, Edna May Oliver, Charles Sellon, Ethel Wales, Hyman Meyer, Jean Harlow.

A remake (after less than three years) of Frank Tuttle's "Love 'Em and Leave
"Em", "The Saturday Night Kid" inevitably suffers by comparison with the original. (Perhaps only First National's "The Gorilla" was remade in a shorter period of time; Paramount obviously were so conscious of it that they deliberately kept the title of the original play out of their credits). For one thing, "Love 'Em And Leave 'Em" was made at the zenith of Paramount's slick, sophisticated romantic-comedy period. The remake was done in those uneasy, faltering, early days of sound. Yet, while it certainly hasn't the technique of an "Applause" or a "Hallelujah", it's not a bad film either. While it's a dialogue film, it's not a slow dialogue film; there is frequent change of pace and set, and the dialogue itself is fast and snappy. Too, the film is quite short -- of almost exactly the same footage as the original. (Rare is the remake that doesn't add a couple of reels of padding).

But of course, the biggest drawback is the memory of Louise Brooks in the original. Her "bad sister" was so smoothly and delightfully amoral, so lacking in spite (she was bad just because it was the easiest and most natural way to be) and so exquisitely lovely, that one really couldn't hold her sins against her. As for Evelyn Brent as the "good sister", one sympathized with her misfortunes, but she was really too good, and too much of a bore to warrant more than polite interest. Here the situation is quite reversed. Jean Arthur, in the old Brooks role, still steals most of the attention because it's the stronger role, but she plays it as an out-and-out bitch, with none of the guile and subtlety of Miss Brooks. Why people don't see through her right away is a mystery. Clara Bow on the other hand -- a rather plumper Clara than we'd like, "tis true, makes goodness seem far less dull this time by virtue of her own personality, toned down though it is.

Eddie Sutherland, who directed "The Saturday Night Kid", was formerly married to Louise Brooks. They were divorced in 1928. One wonders (idly) whether perhaps this might have had something to do with the rather unsympathetic new emphasis in the famous Brooks role.

Even apart from the rather unfair Brooks-Arthur comparison, the film falls somewhat short of the original on other scores. As I recall it, the silent film got rather more fun and flavor out of the store background. And it certainly got more guts into the villain (originally Osgood Perkins) who wound up in a really all-out no-holds-barred fight with the heroine. However, the new one has a lot to offer too; some of the store sequences, largely dominated by Edna May Oliver, are very funny, and some of the dramatic moments (Clara's under-played little prayer) are surprisingly touching. In retrospect, however, it's a little sad to see Clara, her era obviously over, on the way out -- with the attention going to up-and-coming Jean Arthur, and her own sex-symbol successor Jean Harlow hovering patiently around in the background, biding her time. Although last in the cast in the official (synopsis) credit sheet, Harlow doesn't get screen credit, and there seems almost a conspiracy to keep her off the screen. She's there ALL the time -- in the store, at a party -- but always just behind someone else, or just off-screen, or with only her shock of blonde hair standing out in the middle of a crowd. She does get a couple of scenes nearer the camera however, and one short line. Within a year, though, and largely to her friendship with James Hall, nurtured during this film, she was playing with him in "Hell's Angels" -- which we'll be showing on the 28th. Incidentally, "The Saturday Night Kid" was also put out in a completely written version -- with titles written by Joseph L. Mankievicz.

Wm. K. Everson

Tuesday next, 21st: DANCER'S PERIL, 1917; Alice Brady's Montagu Love
TRACKED BY THE POLICE, 1928; Rin Tin Tin; Jason Robards
20th: HELL'S ANGELS - Ben Lyon; Jean Harlow; James Hall
Comings: THE BROKEN MASK (Gullen Vandis) ROSE OF KILDARE (H.B. Walthall); THE MANKMAN & THE RING (silent Hitchcocks); BOHEMIAN GIRL (British, 1922); FOUR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE (DeMille, '34) TAXI (Tagney, '32) CHANGERS (Douglas Fairbanks Jr.; Alan Dwan, '23); CANARY MURDER CASE (Louise Brooks, '29)