

## Another way / KFAT is for Fatheads



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GILROY — We interrupt this newspaper to bring you a commercial message that was actually aired last Friday on KFAT radio, 94½ on your radio dial. John Phillip, cue the "Washington Post March." Deep-voiced announcer, hit it:

*We brought you Hiroshima, and you loved Nagasaki ... Now, we're proud to announce a new concept for the nuclear age — the neutron bomb!*

*Many third world nations are already switching from the leading brand ... Guaranteed to destroy all life in the target area within 48 hours, or your money cheerfully refunded.*

*Sure, hydrogen bombs are nice. But the neutron bomb saves you the hassle of, and expense of, rebuilding those countries you've conquered.*

*Write today ... Dealer inquiries are invited ... The world leader in atomic warfare supplies since 1945 ... the pioneer of the nuclear age ... the United States Department of Defense.*

Delivered straight-voiced and without a disclaimer, this bizarre message may have provided listeners new to the KFAT format with an amusing surprise. And some who heard it Friday, speculates disc jockey Gordy Broshear, may not have even realized the message was

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a prank — that's happened before.

But veteran KFAT followers — a wide ranging band termed Fatties or Fatheads — probably didn't even raise an earlobe when they caught the strange ramblings coming out of their radio.

At KFAT, purely false advertisements are a regular part of a highly irregular programming package.

Country music, weird announcements, blue grass music, goofball contests (a cluck-off), rock music, fake news items, blue (as opposed to blue grass) music, happenings (an on-the-air arrest) — all share airtime at KFAT.

It is a truly offbeat blend. And it seems to be working for the 3-year-old station, which is housed in a 2-story rented building in this small town about 75 miles south of San Francisco.

"In general terms," says station owner Jeremy Lansman, "we rank somewhere between the highest and the lowest in the latest ratings.

Perhaps more significantly, the station is attracting advertisers — no, not the U.S. defense department — and Lansman says KFAT finally is beginning to end each month in the black.

KFAT also appears to be attracting listeners. They write or call in from Santa Rosa to Soledad. There's even a gang of hard-core followers at Yosemite. The station's "I found it" stickers are becoming increasingly noticeable throughout Northern California. Most listeners are 24 to 36 years old, Lansman says.

Things weren't always this rosy.

"It's finally starting to get fun after three years of terror," admits Lansman, who is a young-looking 36 years, casually dressed, slightly built, and appears to comb his unruly brown hair with a wagon wheel.

Cue cliché beginning: It all started with a 90-watt radio station, \$160,000, and a young man with a dream.

"Having a subversive country station was always a dream of mine," says Lansman.

His is the classic tale of a radio nut. "I was exposed to the stuff at an early age and became addicted," Lansman notes. At age seven, he put together a broadcast kit and aired his first show on his father's radio station in St. Louis.

Eventually, he started a noncommercial, listener-owned radio station in St. Louis. But after the five years, the lure of California and money pulled him West.

"I did a station where I didn't want to make any money," he recalls, "and now I wanted to do a station to just make money. Buy it and sell it to anyone for anything I could get."

First, he tried to buy a Los Gatos television station. But when another buyer entered the bidding, Lansman bowed out: "Let them lose the money."

Then Lansman heard about KSND, a traditional country station in Gilroy. For an initial buy-in of \$160,000, it was his.

Lansman brought in a Texas radio whiz to run the station, and they changed its call letters to KFAT. "We wanted to be reputable," Lansman says, "but all the letters were gone. So we said let's go with FAT."

Radio politics soon drove away the Texan and his staff, so Lansman and his wife, Laura Ellen Hooper, stepped in to take over the day-to-day operation of KFAT.

"I won't sell it now," says Lansman, who now has pumped \$250,000 into the station. "It's got my soul in it."

Part of the money he's sunk into KFAT has gone toward boosting the station's once-feeble range. "You used to drive up the road from Gilroy to Morgan Hill, a few miles away, and couldn't hear it," he says. With 1.150 watts, KFAT's signal now can be picked up through much of Northern California.

Things do seem to happen at 94½ FM that are strangers to most other spots on the radio dial. Consider these past moments in FATdom history.

- The arrest. About two years ago, Gilroy police walked into the station's studio and arrested a disc jockey because he had failed to pay \$555 in back traffic tickets. "Everyone was laughing," recalls Broshear, who manned the mike as his colleague was hauled away. "Even as the cops thought it was funny."

- The 25-cent payoff. Listeners were instructed they would receive a quarter if they would send a message and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to KFAT. The idea was to poke fun at other stations' promotional gimmickry.

"After a while," says Broshear, "some people began to figure out it was costing them 26 cents, two 13-cent stamps, to get a quarter back." Still, about 2,000

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listeners participated.

- The Cluck-off. A panel of judges determined the winner from a field of dozens of persons who called in and clucked. The lucky clucker was given all the chicken he could eat for a day.

- The fake newscast. "The paraquat scare is a hoax being perpetrated by the government, and the PharmChem testing center in Palo Alto is a CIA operation," went the blurb. Many listeners are still convinced it's true, even though the story was

completely false. PharmChem, remembers Broshear, was not amused.

- The Music. KFAT needles navigate over some truly rare records: The most-requested song at the station is an old classic called "Moose Turd Pie." Says Hopper: "It's a harmless old folk joke told by a guy named Utah Phillips."

Yet, an area where Lansman would like to see the station improve is "community relations."

"When we first started," he recalls, looking from his rooftop seat toward Gilroy's two-story skyline, "our

manager decided to throw a Chamber of Commerce breakfast. No one came. That sort of set the precedent, and we decided to concentrate our energies elsewhere."

Even now, says Lansman, most KFAT advertisers are located outside Gilroy.

As a community relations effort, the station has begun offering Fat Fries, a weekly two-hour show broadcast live from a Palo Alto nightclub.

Letters to KFAT — Hopper's got an entire drawerful — tell something about the station and its audience.

They come from serious listeners: "I think your

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station should have a policy demanding promoters announce their take . . . I just heard a commercial for a concert "To Save The Whales." What percent goes to the whales? Do the whales know how to spend this kind of money?"

They come from folks like Armpit McSweat, who wrote a letter about "Stomper de biker. He aint round no more though; turned pro. went to KC for the nationals cockroach stompin contest."

(That's KFAT).