

America's #1 hoaxer makes headlines that fool millions

He's bamboozled newspapers & television stations (but he's never caught out *The Enquirer*)

Hundreds of thousands of TV viewers were appalled to see a news report on a brothel for sexually deprived male dogs, staffed by "bewitching bitches."

But it turned out to be a clever hoax perpetrated by America's greatest practical joker, Joey Skaggs!

To fabricate his "Cathouse for Dogs," Skaggs got together 25 actors and 15 dogs in a rented loft and videotaped a lineup of seductive female canines — ranging from "Fifi the French Poodle," to "Lady the Tramp."

Skaggs sent the video to New York City's WABC-TV, which built a whole story around the tape — including the reactions of outraged veterinarians and ASPCA members.

Incredibly, the subsequent news report was nominated for a New York Emmy award — before Skaggs embarrassed station execs by revealing the whole thing as a hoax!

That's just one of more than 50 amazing practical jokes that Skaggs has executed over the past 28 years, with some of the more elaborate stunts costing as much as \$5,000.

His hoaxes have fooled millions — including many top reporters who've been left red-faced after passing on his phony stories as fact.

"All I have to do is set the wheels in motion. The media takes over from there," said Skaggs, a teacher at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Over the years, Skaggs has posed as:

- A doctor who cures baldness by transplanting hairy scalps from cadavers onto live bald men.
- The head of "The Fat



HOT DOG! Relax, folks, these tasty snacks Joey Skaggs cooked up (above) came from the supermarket. Joey's story that a food company wanted to make meals out of strays drew howls of protest. At left, Joey poses as a doctor with a bizarre cure for baldness.



Squad," a commando team of guerilla diet gurus who move in with tubby folks and physically restrain them from eating.

• The promoter of a virtual reality vacation resort called "Comacocoon," where vacationers experience all the

pleasures of an exotic vacation, while under total anesthesia. "You'd get tanned, relaxed and you wouldn't have to worry about losing your luggage," he chuckled.

• A food service supplier seeking unwanted dogs to be turned into meals.

Skaggs' wacky fake stories almost always get picked up and covered by gullible members of the mainstream media.

"I'm trying to teach people to beware of slipshod and deceptive journalism," Skaggs explained. "People should be skeptical of all that they hear."

For the "dog food" scam, Skaggs mailed 1,500 letters to animal shelters across the country announcing that his company was seeking to pur-

chase unwanted dogs at 10 cents per pound, for human consumption.

The letters included a New York City phone number. The phone was answered by a recorded message — with barking dogs in the background!

OLD FOLKS ARE THE MOST HONEST PEOPLE, POLL FINDS

If you ever lose a wallet containing \$1,000 in cash, pray an olderster finds it. In a nationwide poll, only 2 percent of folks over age 65 said they'd keep the money — but 21 percent of people between 18 and 34 would hang on to it!

That's one of several eye-openers in the recent poll of



Within two days the phone line was swamped with thousands of calls from angry dog lovers, police and reporters.

"Radio, newspaper and TV reporters around the country reported on this story," said Skaggs. "Several reports even detailed conversations that individuals claimed to have had with a representative of the company — none of those conversations ever took place."

The prankster always provides clues that give reporters a fair chance to uncover his fabrications — but they almost never do.

The biggest red flag is usually the wacky names he chooses for his aliases.

"When I was head of the 'Fat Squad,' I told a morning TV show my name was Joe Bones," he said. "Did that set off any bells? No — they WANTED to believe the story."

Media critic Jeff Cohen of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting calls Skaggs, 48, "a genius."

"He proves that reporters just rush some stories into print, not even caring if they're true or not."

Skaggs admits there IS one publication he's never been able to dupe with his phony stories: "I haven't gotten one past *The ENQUIRER* yet!"

— CHRIS RODELL

The opportunities of the past are now obvious.

— Robert Half

Surprise! Single gals spend more on cars and tobacco than guys do

Single women spend more of their paychecks on cars and tobacco products than their male counterparts, a recent study reveals.

Men are more likely to tinker with their cars and do their own repairs, while women pay to

have mechanics do the job.

Gals also spend 30 percent more on clothes than men do, twice as much on personal grooming, and nearly five times more on household items such as cleaning supplies, according to the University of South Florida study of singles, age 21 to 35.

1,000 adults. Here are more:

Nearly one out of four people — 24 percent — say they wouldn't correct a waiter who undercharged them on a food bill. And 23 percent would commit a crime if they could pocket \$10 million without getting caught, according to the poll conducted by Money magazine.