

IN-DEPTH: U-HAUL'S MODERN SUPERGRAPHICS

How drive-by trivia comes to pass

It takes research, artistic talent and a bunch of trucks

BY JOHN BORDSEN
Travel Editor

Did you know that prehistoric South Dakota was covered by a sea filled with giant turtles? That Florida's ghost orchid resembles the shape of a flying frog? That if the Hubble Space Telescope had a home, it would be Maryland's Goddard Space Flight Center?

Well, maybe you're a finalist on "American Nerd" or a Trivial Pursuit shark.

Or perhaps you have an eye for the work of artist Steve King, whose traveling exhibition can be seen on the sides of more than 17,500 U-Haul trucks. King is the creator of Modern SuperGraphics - the latest set in the rent-a-truck company's series of side-panel illustrations.

Each work uses a factoid to extend a state or Canadian province. North Carolina's, for example, shows a Venus Flytrap. While the famed carnivorous plant can be found in many parts of North America, it is native only to an area near Wilmington.

There are 29 of his illustrations on the road right now, clicking with state-savvy spectators and piquing the curiosity of others. The end-effect is the same: Reminding you of the vast variety of exotic and fun things that you can drive to.

In ad-speak, it's a campaign that "brands" U-Haul as a go-anywhere, coast-to-coast vehicle-leasing firm. (There's no correlation, by the way, between where a truck is and which graphic is on its sides.)

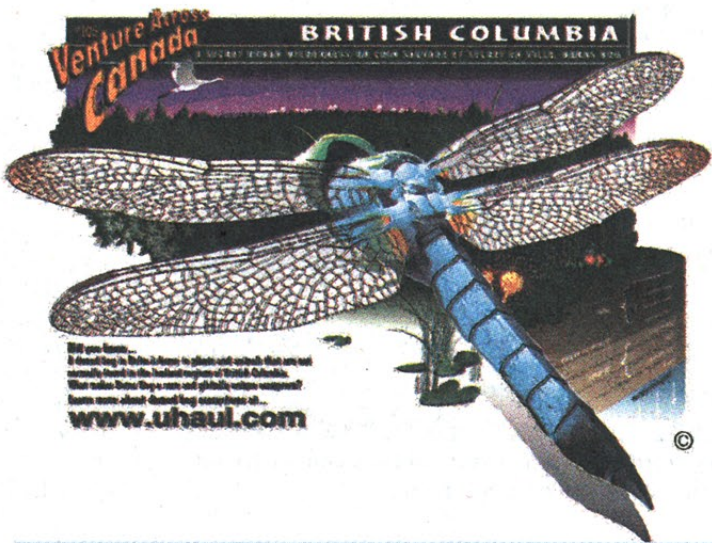
U-Haul's SuperGraphics has quite a track record: The original "Classic" series ran on trucks



Artist Steve King (from left) reviews a SuperGraphics with U-Haul colleagues Gary Robertson and Monique Meadows.

"The graphics showed cornfields, the State of Liberty and other things that made people feel warm and cushy."

About 74,000 trucks with the original Classic graphics are still on the road - from Hawaii (showing tropical fish) to Nova Scotia (a schooner). That's four out of five trucks in U-Haul's fleet of 92,000. When the series ran its course, U-Haul decided to redo the states and provinces - with more colors and complexity. And they'd show less-obvious attractions that would prompt a little educational



See More Illustrations

- U-Haul SuperGraphics are online at www.uhaul.com. The modern series can be downloaded as "coloring book" images and/or computer wallpaper.
- Other work by commercial artist Steve King is on his Web site: www.steveking.org.



from 1988 to 1997. There were 78 illustrations, all obvious choices: Wright Brothers for North Carolina, a stock-car race for South Carolina, Mount Rushmore for South Dakota, the Golden Gate Bridge, surfing and San Diego Zoo koala bears for California....

Most were done by freelancers, kept visually simple and used two or three colors, max. They looked like stamps, or old-time steam-trunk stickers. And they worked.

"They drew attention to U-Haul vehicles and gave the impression that U-Haul is America-friendly," says Scott Campbell, He's president of Roadmark, a Massachusetts company specializing in mobile media - ads on trucks, buses and other vehicles.

head-scratching. That's what the Modern SuperGraphics series has done. The latest in the line is Wyoming, introduced in December. It concerns Expedition Island, near present-day Green River. That's where frontiersman John Wesley Powell set off to explore the Colorado River in 1869. Foam fits around a rowboat that's careening toward you; the two oarsmen look worried. But not Powell, standing in the stern and navigating dangerous rapids deep in a gorge. Powell is accurately shown as missing an arm (lost in the Civil War).

Artist behind the series
King, the 39-year-old artist, was



raised in Tucson, where he attended the University of Arizona and Art Center Design College. After a couple of years with an ad agency in Idaho, he returned to Tucson to teach graphics at the Art Center, a private, four-year college. Five years ago, he hooked up with U-Haul, which is headquartered in Phoenix, two hours north.

King illustrates other U-Haul projects - like recently decorating a Transformer-type company truck that converted into a portable wrestling ring for the "Monster Garage" reality show on Discovery Channel.

Each SuperGraphic illustration is affixed to approximately 600 trucks.

The process begins in a trivial fashion. He and his boss, senior art director Monique Meadows, scan TV, magazines, journals, books and the Internet for factoids that could link a state and a concept. This keeps the graphics idea-driven - a process that's easier, King says, than selecting a state and then learning its peculiarities.

When the need arises, he and Meadows go through a state's bulging files, looking for the strongest visual concept.

It's still hit-and-miss: Weeks of research can be written off if a factoid leads to controversy, meanders off target or heads over the border to a state that's already been done.



Chain of command

Another run up the U-Haul chain of command. Eventually, the completed artwork lands on the desk of CEO Joe Shoen, who has been involved throughout the process.

When the last tweaking is finished, the computerized illustration is sent to Kargo, a U-haul subsidiary in Pennsylvania, and printed on white vinyl sheets. The sheets are machine-trimmed into enormous decals with adhesive on the back.

For a big truck - the 26-foot Jumbo Haulers - the image is split into two overlapping segments, each 48 by 120 inches. For the 10-foot Thrifty Mover, a whole

postcard can be done in a single 60-by-70-inch sheet.

They're then sent to the nine U-Haul plants in North America where new trucks are outfitted and customized, and where older vehicles have their sides "reimagined."

The speed of the sketch-to-sheet process depends on demand. King says the fastest turnaround happened about three years ago, when the company bought 5,000 vehicles in one swoop. They were doing one illustration every five weeks, concept to truck.

The paperwork for each design - the sketches, the notes, the in-progress renderings - ends up in a pair of ring-binders on King's desk. With 29 Modern images done, he has a 58-volume desk-side library.

His favorite? "Nebraska, because it was artistically complicated - a lot of lines and obscure shapes. It was just fun to put together."

It shows a prehistoric rhino: A thriving habitat of them lived near Royal, Neb., 10 million years ago. A blanket of volcanic ash preserved the site, today's Ashfall Fossil Beds Historic Site.

Thoughts on his home state's graphic? "It shows a computer chip because we were trying to go with the whole Silicon-Valley-in-the-Arizona-desert thing. That was the third or fourth one we did, when we were trying to decide where we wanted to go with the program."

The most rare Modern SuperGraphic? The first, which showed a sunflower for Kansas. It wasn't surprising enough. It's not even on the company's Web site (www.uhaul.com).

King says the Modern series got its oddball footing with the second illustration, Nevada, which shows a swooping flying saucer with big windows and tail fins. No consultation with government experts on this one.

"Two movies had just come out - 'Men in Black' and 'Contact.' Joe Shoen came to me and used them as examples of how they give you a different perspective about normal situations or subjects."

The illustration concerns Area 51, a remote expanse in southern

Nevada where UFOs and top-secret military aircraft are said to be located.

Oddly, they're more numerous than you'd expect, according to King.

"There are more than 600 of them, because that SuperGraphic came out right when a whole bunch of trucks were purchased."

Urban U-Haul

There's also a series of Classic SuperGraphics that spotlights American cities. You can see them on rental trailers.

How'd U fare on our quiz?

- 1. NEBRASKA.** Ancient animals are buried in ash at Ashfall Fossil Beds.
- 2. TEXAS.** Coral grows offshore at the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.
- 3. WASHINGTON.** The Olympic torrent salamander is among the rare rain forest creatures living in Olympic National Park.
- 4. VERMONT.** "Champ" is the Loch Ness Monster-style creature that some believe is lurking in Lake Champlain.
- 5. ARKANSAS.** Visitors can search for diamonds in Crater of Diamonds State Park in "The Gem State."
- 6. NEW JERSEY.** Fluorescent minerals are found in the Franklin and Sterling Hill mining district of Sussex County; they're on display at the Franklin Mineral Museum and Sterling Hill Mining Museum.
- 7. IOWA.** A crater 24 miles wide was created when a meteor hit Pocahontas County. It was hidden by glacial sediment.
- 8. MICHIGAN.** The armillaria mushroom - "Humongous Fungus," at least 37 acres across - is a single organism near Crystal Falls.
- 9. KENTUCKY.** Mammoth Cave National Park has about 350 miles of mapped passages.
- 10. OKLAHOMA.** The National Severe Storms Laboratory is in Norman.
- 11. MARYLAND.** The Hubble Space Telescope was developed at the Goddard Space Flight Center.
- 12. UTAH.** The Escalante Canyon holds sandstone pillars and rock bridges created by erosion.
- 13. HAWAII.** The lanalana - known in English as the happy face spider - is a tiny creature found in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.
- 14. WYOMING.** Expedition Island is where explorer John Wesley Powell set off in a boat to explore the Colorado River in 1869.
- 15. FLORIDA.** The ghost orchid can be seen in Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, south-east of Naples.
- 16. PENNSYLVANIA.** The 55-foot keelboat built for the Lewis & Clark expedition was constructed in Pennsylvania.
- 17. SOUTH DAKOTA.** Remains of archelons, gigantic prehistoric turtles, are among the remains found and displayed in a state once at the bottom of an ocean.
- 18. ILLINOIS.** Deposits of prehistoric creatures are buried in Grundy County.
- 19. NORTH CAROLINA.** The carnivorous Venus Flytrap plant is native only to the Wilmington area.
- 20. NORTH DAKOTA.** Flags of the United States, Mexico and Canada fly at the monument of the geographic center of North America, near Rugby.

DOWNLOADS
At www.uhaul.com/supergraphics, you can learn more about these attractions; also there are downloadable "coloring book" pages and computer "wallpaper" images.

Travel

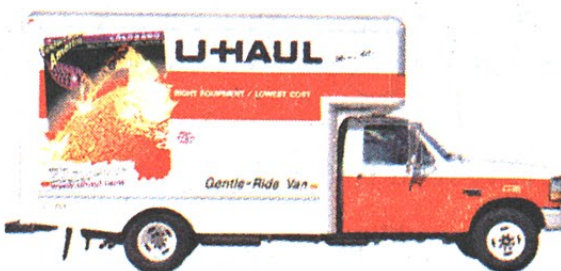
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SUNDAY, JULY 4, 2004



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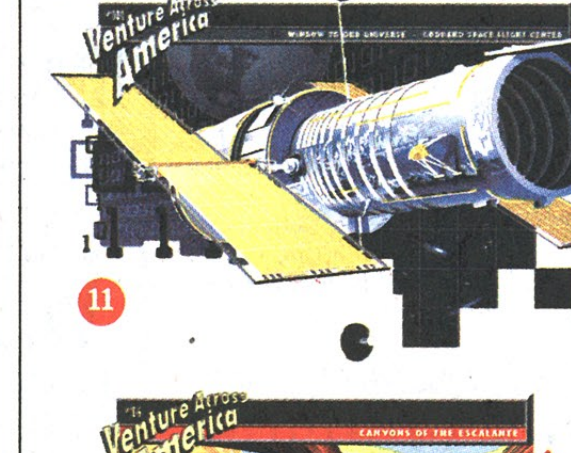
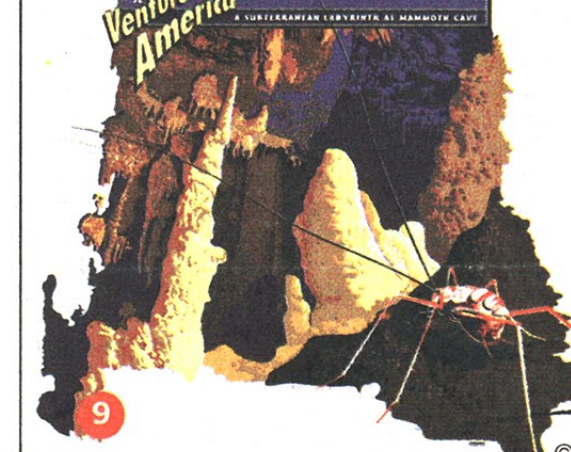
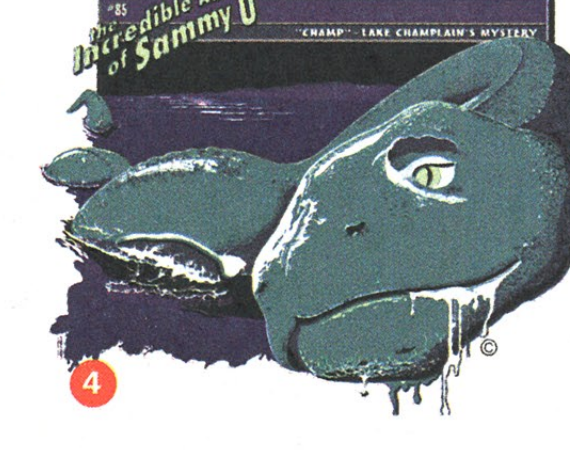
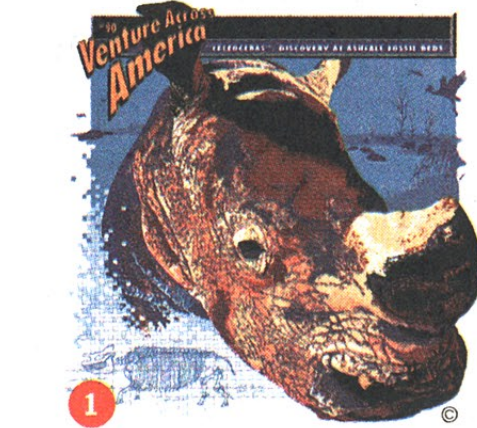


U-Guess

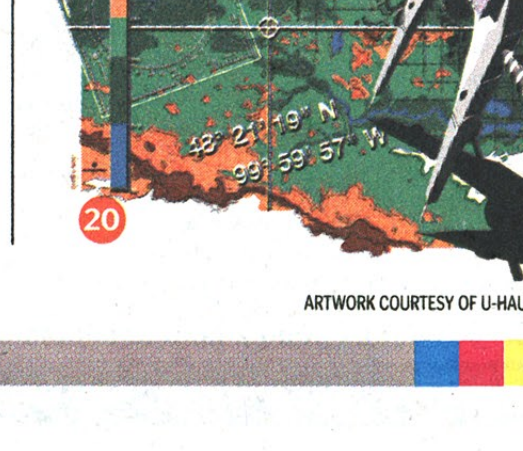
All over America, you can spot eye-catching illustrations extolling various states on the sides of U-Haul trucks. How well have you been paying attention?

U-Haul trucks have long carried art showing the wonders of the United States, coast to coast. The latest series has rolled out close to 30 illustrations so far, but these new ones don't show obvious attractions: They're head-scratchers! Can you match the state with its U-Haul artwork?

ON PAGE 61 | See the answers - and meet the artist behind the series.



- ARKANSAS:** It's a gem.
- FLORIDA:** Big moths pollinate a ghostly pale rarity.
- HAWAII:** The lanalana was identified in 1900 - and not seen again until 1972!
- ILLINOIS:** Mollusk deposits reveal it was the heart of a prehistoric continent.
- IOWA:** Flatland's prehistoric forest was flattened by a comet.
- KENTUCKY:** No bluegrass grows in this famed labyrinth.
- MARYLAND:** Being home of Hubble gives this state a close-up look at stars.
- MICHIGAN:** It weighs more than 110 tons and is alive and well in Crystal Falls.
- NEBRASKA:** Home (under volcanic ash) of ancient treasurers.
- NEW JERSEY:** Site of a mine where fluorescent light makes ore glow.
- NORTH CAROLINA:** Home of a famed fly-muncher.
- NORTH DAKOTA:** Center stage for Mexico, Canada and the United States.
- OKLAHOMA:** Where scientists take a severe look at weather.
- PENNSYLVANIA:** Lewis & Clark had to pick this up in Pittsburgh in order to head west.
- SOUTH DAKOTA:** A teeming ocean ebbed and flowed over today's plains and prairies.
- TEXAS:** Big ships stay clear of its off-shore, coral-filled marine sanctuary.
- UTAH:** Beautiful but desolate Escalante art by Mother Nature.
- VERMONT:** The "Champ" of Lake Champlain is something of a legend.
- WASHINGTON:** Rhyacotriton olympicus slithers around Olympic National Park rain forests.
- WYOMING:** In 1869, John Wesley Powell left Expedition Island to explore the Colorado River.



ARTWORK COURTESY OF U-HAUL