# Snow time like summer as store flies in Santa in helicopter

LANDING PAD: Ad's posh homes

SNOW MAN: Film crew set scene

GIFT WRAP: Copter is hidden

Pictures: STAN KUJAWA

SANT-AIR: Helicopter is full of gifts

# M&S Xmas ad comes whirly

**EXCLUSIVE**

by **Sharon Feinstein**

**IT looks like the Christmas ad battle is taking off already...**

Marks & Spencer has just finished filming its festive campaign – with a helicopter full of gift-wrapped surprises to help sleigh its rivals.

Bosses used fake snow to turn a London square into a Christmas paradise – with families waking up to find the ground blanketed white.

These exclusive pictures show how the M&S Santa dropped in by helicopter as the supermarket threw down the gauntlet in the Christmas advert war.

They took over a sleepy square in Islington, North London – close to where Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson lives – for two weeks.

Two Georgian terrace houses were used for the filming, decked out in tinsel and baubles.

The street was blocked off and covered in fake snow, with child actors wrapped in jackets and woolly hats to complete the scene.

And after the success other stores have had with animal themes, M&S is hoping to round up viewers this year with an Australian sheep dog. Last year Sainsbury's Mog the Forgetful Cat tugged on the heart-strings to win the ratings battle. That followed a huge hit for the John Lewis penguins the previous year.

M&S is understood to have paid up to £3,000 a day to use homes for filming – and given "thousands of pounds" to the Islington Association.

A source said: "They're spending a fortune, with helicopters and the top location. It shows they're really keen to beat Sainsbury's and John Lewis this year."

The advert is a change of direction for M&S after last year, when it released a series of seven short ads, keying in to its "Art Of" campaign.

Christmas adverts have become big business for retailers.

Last year John Lewis spent £7million on its festive campaign. They teamed up with Age UK for Man on the Moon, which featured an elderly man stuck on the moon.

The advert cost £1million to make, and a further £6million was spent buying slots on television, the internet and press. It got nearly 23million views on YouTube.

But – following the unwritten rule that cats always win the internet – it was still beaten by Sainsbury's Mog the Forgetful Cat which was watched 26million times.

The revamped childhood favourite was narrated by Emma Thompson.

"Christmas ads have become a thing in themselves," says Robert Jones, a visiting professor of brand leadership at the University of East Anglia.

"They are a cultural event in their own right."

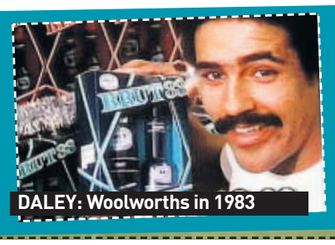
Currys PC World brought in Independence Day star Jeff Goldblum as part of last year's £10million campaign, teaching people how to "act delighted" when they opened unwanted gifts. And fashion house Burberry filmed a tribute to dance movie Billy Elliot, with Romeo Beckham, James Corden and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley leaping around to the music of T. Rex.

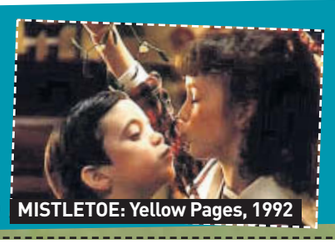
Aldi's initial 2015 campaign fell flat – but it won over viewers with a cheeky low-budget spoof of John Lewis' Man on the Moon advert, getting itself two million views.

But it was Tesco that was left telling itself "every little helps" – after its series of four ads managed to attract less than 600,000 views.

SANTA CLAWS: Doggy stars of M&S Xmas ad

## TV Xmas ads yule remember


DALEY: Woolworths in 1983


MISTLETOE: Yellow Pages, 1992

HOLIDAYS: Coca Cola in 1995

SNOWMAN: Irn Bru in 2006

MOON MAN: John Lewis 2015