

Oxford Australia Word of the Month

November 2007

not happy Jan – a way of indicating that you have been greatly annoyed by a person's behaviour

Australian National Dictionary Centre

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not happy Jan

The story behind the Word of the Month

On 4 October 2006 the *Gold Coast Bulletin* newspaper reported:

Gold Coast meter maids boss Roberta Aitcheson yesterday joined a chorus of criticism over the pre-game entertainment, which showed men and women in skimpy, ill-fitting costumes and jumpsuits ... Ms Aitcheson said yesterday: 'I thought the show was disgusting and I was gob-smacked when they came out ... It was tacky and crass and cheap and it demeaned the whole image they were trying to portray. To be honest, I was shocked and I have sent the NRL a strongly worded letter expressing my displeasure. **Not happy, Jan.**'

The phrase **not happy, Jan** has now firmly established its place in Australian English. It began its career in 2002 in a television advertisement for the Yellow Pages. At the beginning of the advertisement the boss of a company is flicking through the newly-arrived Yellow Pages and can't find the advertisement for her company. The advertisement was to have been placed by the employee Jan, who missed the deadline. In response to her boss's loud question about what happened to the advertisement, Jan flees the building. The boss opens an upstairs window and yells **Not happy, Jan** after the hapless, fleeing Jan. If you missed the advertisement, it can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2akt3P8itLM>.

New phrases do not enter the language at a fast rate. For example, the idiom **straight to the poolroom** was a favourite of Darryl Kerrigan in the 1997 Australian movie *The Castle*. It is used to refer to something that is regarded as so special that it cannot be used, but must go on display. 'Darl, this Chinese vase you've painted is beautiful—it's going straight to the poolroom.' But it has not yet established itself in the Australian vernacular as firmly as **not happy, Jan**. Similarly, during the Winter Olympics at Salt Lake City in 2002, Stephen

Bradbury won a gold medal in the short track speed-skating competition, when all the other skaters fell. In the following months, the phrase **to do a Bradbury** was widely used to describe someone who came from behind to be the unlikely winner of a contest. But the idiom has now almost entirely disappeared.

Why do some phrases last and others disappear? The process of language generation is unpredictable, but one of the interesting features of the phrase **not happy, Jan** is its capacity for endless variation. This was illustrated in the 2004 Federal election campaign when John Howard was lampooned with advertisements and bumper stickers proclaiming **not happy, John**.

Here is an early example of variation from the *Gold Coast Bulletin* on 2 December 2003:

At 8.30 pm last Wednesday a lady on our body corporate drove home after a business engagement. She was told by the policewoman at the barricade that she could not use her street to access her property because 'we're not letting anyone in—we've got the Premier (Peter Beattie) here tonight'. The woman eventually found a car park blocks away and had to walk home through the Schoolies crowds—it cost her \$20. While she did this about a dozen other cars used that very same street to depart from the public car parks in it. **Not happy, Peter**.

And a later example from the *Melbourne Age* on 15 August 2006, where the reference is to Bill Gates:

I checked on the internet and found that this is a documented bug. And one that Microsoft has refused to acknowledge. It's OK if you save your work regularly, but—once again—**not happy, Bill**.

There is no doubt that the phrase **not happy, Jan** has found a permanent role in Australian English.

metrosexual
weapon
of mass
destruction
karrack
glycaemic
burka
index
barbecue stopper
senior moment
Sudoku
hornbag
dishlicker
witlof
cyberstalking
Naltrexone
pear-
shaped
Bioterrorism
yakitori