



The Reviews

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In this film, hucksters are the product

Hur-ray, hur-ray, step right up and behold this Space Age marvel. It slices, it dices, it thoroughly entertains. It's Pitch People, a documentary on those mesmerizing spielmeisters who hawk everything from carving knives to feather dusters to coleslaw/salsa makers, yammering at us from carnival booths and television screens.

Filmmaker Stanley Jacobs follows the community of fast-talking product demonstrators who travel from fair to fair, living off their ability to bequile and separate us from our money by pitching gizmos that cut vegetables into slinkies. Gizmos that we buy and throw in drawers when we realize we cannot make them work like the pitch people did.

In glib, mellifluous interviews, they give away a few trade secrets -- "It's not what you sell, it's how you tell them the price," explains one practitioner -- but don't expect to learn enough to prevent you from falling for these genial sales artists the next time. In fact, you will probably gain a new affection for their skills. They are, of course, selling to Jacobs and seducing the camera as they talk.

Pitch People is more tribute than expose and by the end you wouldn't want it any other way. Jacobs begins with the traveling snake oil salesmen (represented cheekily by a clip from Danny Kaye's *The Court Jester*) and eventually takes us inside the television studios of today's sophisticated infomercials. He overreaches, attempting to widen his topic to the sociology of American consumerism, but like the plastic knives that we see frequently cutting into the head of a steel hammer, Pitch People never gets dull.

