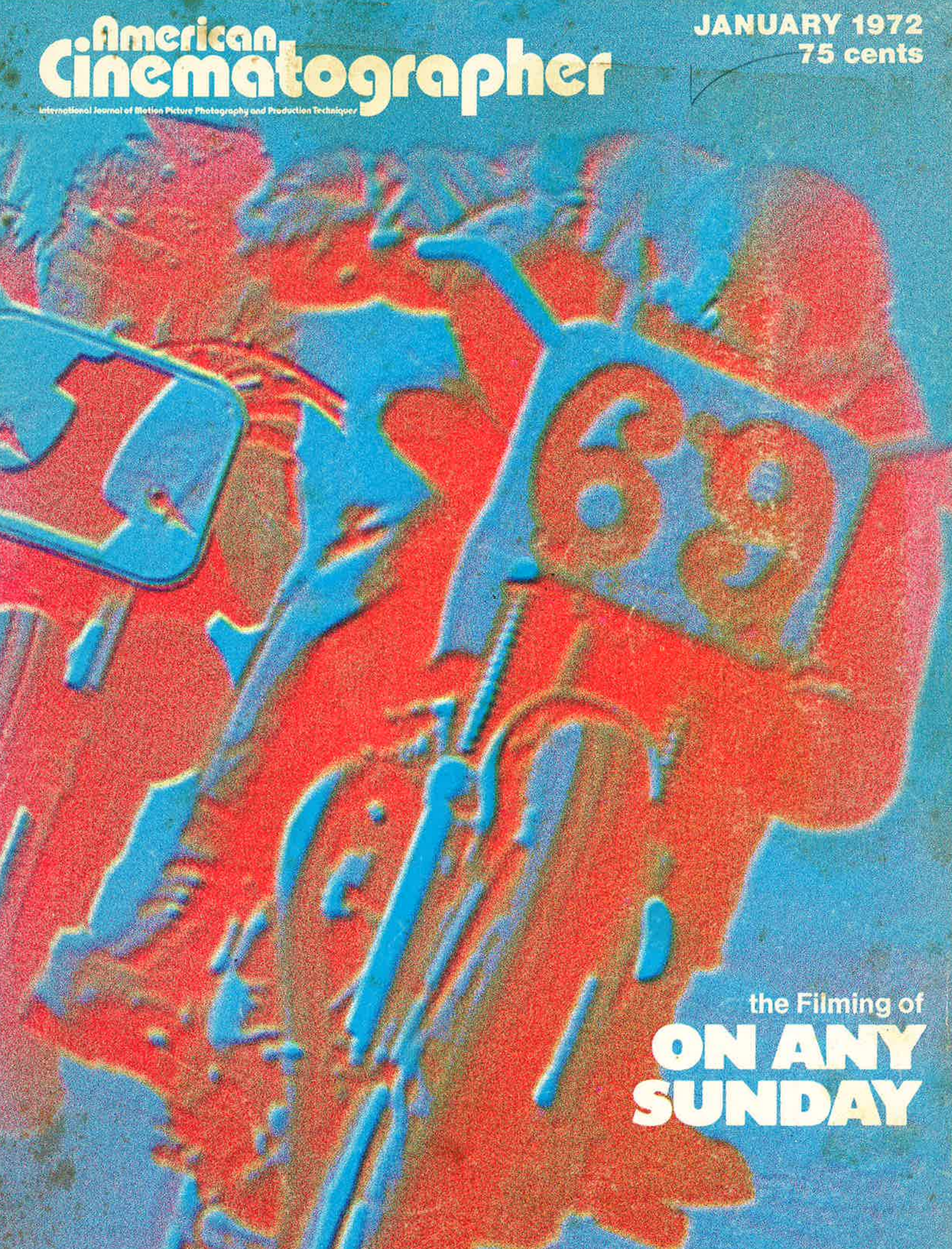


# American Cinematographer

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the Filming of  
**ON ANY  
SUNDAY**

# THE FILMING OF **ON ANY SUNDAY**

Bruce Brown's cinematic  
paean to motorcycles and  
the men who ride them

By BOB BAGLEY

If there is any one trend in film-making for the '70's, it might be expressed in the ungrammatical phrase, "Tell it like it really is." How simple to say, yet how difficult to achieve! Still, this is what Bruce Brown proposed to do for motorcycling, both amateur and professional, in his film, "ON ANY SUNDAY". As his production manager, cameraman, head-holder, friend and associate, I was involved in every phase of planning, filming, post-production and releasing of "ON ANY SUNDAY". I would imagine this qualifies me to tell the story of this particular venture "like it really was".

To begin with, Bruce is not the typical Hollywood producer. Though he is a genuine professional and his picture, "THE ENDLESS SUMMER" is regarded by most critics as the classic film on surfing, his approach is somewhat unorthodox. The commercial aspect is secondary to what moves and excites him personally. It's as if he sat in your living room and said, "Hey, I'm really fascinated by motorcycles and the people who ride them. The guys who race are just amazing. I'd like to tell you some of the stories from my own association with the sport, and maybe you will share my enthusiasm and my respect for these guys."

While no two producers can call upon the same resources of talent, time or money, I feel our experience in filming "ON ANY SUNDAY" will benefit any film-maker who is committed to making his own personal statement in his own

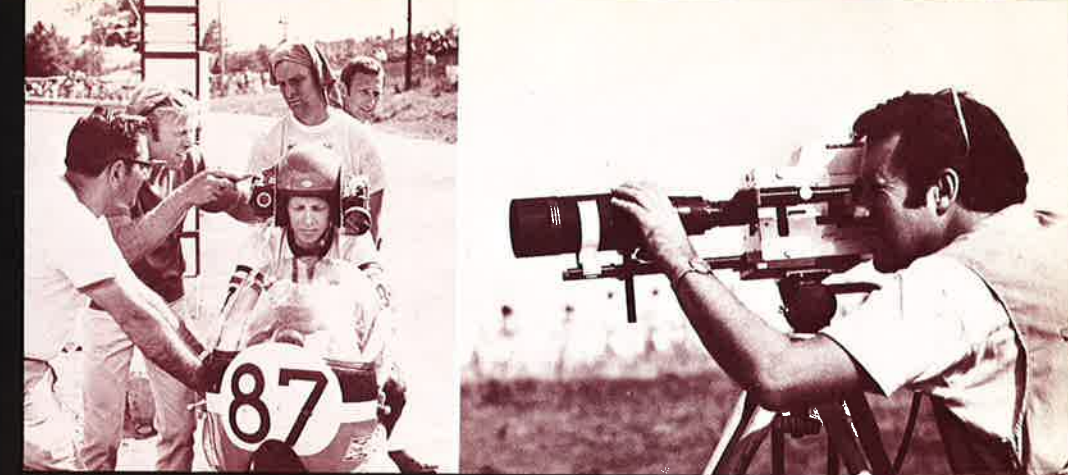
personal way. Not everyone can afford the luxury of over two years of shooting more than 300,000 feet of film as we did, but the problems of getting together an efficient crew, locating necessary equipment, and keeping the momentum going until the project is complete are common to every production.

Bruce has been a cycling enthusiast almost as long as he's been a surfer, so the idea for "ON ANY SUNDAY" has been in his mind for a long time. However, it was by our production of a motorcycle racing segment of ABC's *Wide World of Sports* which really got us going on the picture.

Because Bruce's films appear somewhat unstructured in the conventional sense, it is easy to get the impression that production is easy-going, but this is far from the case. Bruce is very exacting about what he wants, and even if he has to do everything himself, as he often does, he usually gets what he goes after. This production entailed a great deal of careful planning.

We knew, for example, that we would have to shoot reels and reels more film than we would eventually use. We knew that filming conditions would be difficult, even hazardous. We expected to do a great deal of traveling in all kinds of weather, from the 115-degree heat of Bonneville, Utah, to the 20-below-zero of Quebec. Therefore, it would be essential to select equipment that was sturdy, portable, and dependable. It was easy to conclude that we should shoot in 16mm; on the amount of footage we would need to cover motorcycling in depth, the cost of 35mm negative alone would be prohibitive, even if the equipment were not too unwieldy for our type of filming. Too, we knew that, over a long time span, we could rely on the consistency of Eastman processing to maintain the kind of control we wanted.

Always keeping in mind that we would have the film blown up to 35mm for theatrical release, we recognized that the sharpness of the original image would be of paramount importance and that



(LEFT) Bruce Brown adjusts helmet camera on motorcycle racer to get point-of-view shots for "ON ANY SUNDAY". (RIGHT) The author, Bob Bagley focuses telephoto lens for filming of sequence with the Photosonics IP High Speed Camera. Overcranked footage recorded expressions on cyclists' faces and lent a dreamlike quality to the film.

we would require good lenses in a variety of focal lengths. Our years of filming surfing tends to make us lean a good deal toward the telephoto lens, and we intended to use similar equipment and techniques in situations where it is just about as difficult to zero in on a guy on a bike as it is to get a kid on a board. If we were to get more than a vaguely-identifiable blur when machines and their riders zoom off at tremendous speeds, soar over obstacles, or jolt up a mountain, high-speed photography would be a must. We would also need helicopter shots for tracking riders over impossible terrain.

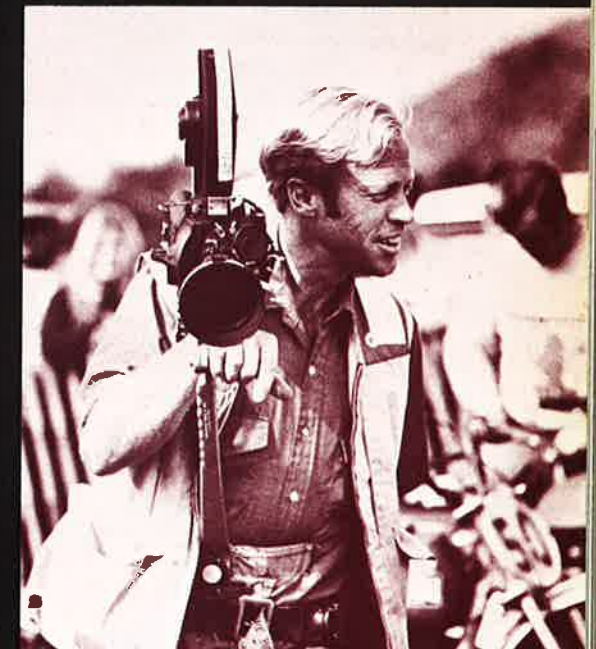
You don't need to be a motorcycle rider yourself, as Bruce and I both are, to know that one of your major problems was going to be dirt. The cycle-churned dust would get in our lenses, mud would splatter camera and cameraman alike, rain and fog would affect our equipment, as might excessively high temperatures. Yet, much of the time we would have to take care of our equipment ourselves on location. So, again, we decided that we should select it on the basis of sturdiness, dependability, and ease of maintenance.

Sound would be a problem, too. We could have super-telephoto camera shots, but how could we match it with telephoto sound? Or slow-motion sound with slow-motion camera work? Would music enhance the mood of a motorcycling picture? If so, what kind of music, and where could we get it?

Also, we would need to evaluate various films and experiment with them. How many additional cameramen would we need for a particular assignment? Who would keep track of the footage once it was in the can?

These are some of the problems we faced at the outset, and obviously there is no one solution for either equipment or personnel when you propose to handle so many varied situations. Though it's an oversimplification to say that for "THE ENDLESS SUMMER", we put our surfboards under one arm, our cameras under the other, and went out and shot a picture, it did give us a lot of experience we could put to good

Having scored with "THE ENDLESS SUMMER", writer-producer-director-cameraman-narrator Bruce Brown repeats success with "ON ANY SUNDAY".





On any Sunday a favored stretch of the Mojave Desert looks like this when as many as 1,000 cyclists line up for a punishing cross-country race.

use on this more complex assignment. We planned the same sort of personal approach, and though Bruce and I are much newer to cycling than to surfing, we had confidence we would learn a great deal as we went along. It might look as though, on any Sunday, we'd just go out and photograph some motorcycle action, but on any Monday, we'd clean up our equipment. On any Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, we'd look at our film to see what we could use and what we could improve upon. On any Friday, we'd get ready to go out again, and on any Saturday, we'd be flying to our next location. After more than a year, we knew every skycap at LAX by his first name.

Though Bruce had a concept of what he wanted to do with the picture from the beginning, there was a lot of trial-and-error in our shooting, probably one of the best reasons why the major studios are content to leave the filming of this sort of documentary to outfits

(ABOUT THE AUTHOR: The association of Bruce Brown and Bob Bagley began when they went to junior high school together in Long Beach, back in the late '40's. After high school, the two more or less went their separate ways, Bruce into filming, and Bob into the business world, with time out to serve as aerial photographer's mate in the Naval Air Reserve.

When at last Bruce asked, "When are you going to quit that cotton-pickin' job and come work for me?", Bob assumed his position as business manager for Bruce Brown Productions, one he held for ten years. In this time, the co-workers were associated on "THE ENDLESS SUMMER" and in producing numerous sports segments for ABC's Wide World of Sports, NBC Sports Specials, CBS Sport Spectaculars, as well as TV commercials and sales films.

With the completion of "ON ANY SUNDAY", Bruce Brown Productions was dissolved. A new company, Bob Bagley and Don Shoemaker Films has been formed, with some impressive credits already on record in the specialty of sports action films. In addition to filming the Carlsbad Moto-Cross for Wide World of Sports and portions of the Baja One Thousand race, the new team has done "George Plimpton—Man Behind the Wheel" for Wolper Productions. Currently, "Peggy Fleming in Europe" is in the works as a sequel to Group One Production's Emmy-award-winning special, "Peggy Fleming in Sun Valley", on which Bob Bagley was cameraman.

Though the item may be correctly classified neither under sport nor business, Bob is married, and he and his wife, Barbara, are the parents of three young children.)

like ours. The first footage we shot, back in October, 1969, was with the two rather elderly Bolex cameras we had used in making "THE ENDLESS SUMMER". Although they have limitations, we have always found them useful for our one-man-crew type of operation. Even for "ON ANY SUNDAY", in photographing the International Six-Day Trials in El Escorial, Spain, Bruce would simply load his Bolex and as many 100-foot loads of film as he could carry onto his own bike and follow the action as best he could. The portability and simplicity of operation of the Bolex was a plus in situations of this sort, resulting in some unique scenes.

For the lion's share of our picture's footage, we went to the Arriflex. We chose the Arriflex-M because it has a gear-driven magazine, not dependent on torque motors. I don't think we used them as the manufacturer intended, with an 8-volt battery, producing up to 50 frames per second. In order to shoot slow-motion, we would set the camera tachometer for 50 frames, using a combination 8-16 volt battery in the 8-volt position. Then we'd flip to 16-volts and presto!—100 frames per second. Exposure was calculated at 24 frames per second and opened up 2 stops, and, luckily, it usually ran within 10 frames. I understand Arriflex has since offered a modification to their cameras with tachometers which make it possible to calibrate camera speed precisely, up to 80 fps, but we figured this out as we went

along. For each camera, we acquired a full complement of lenses, ranging from 500mm down to 5.7mm in focal lengths.

In some sequences, even 100 fps didn't produce the results we wanted to achieve so we also invested in the Photo-Sonics 16mm high-speed camera, Model 1P, which is capable of 400 fps. It was originally designed for instrumentation work, but it makes an excellent sport camera. We used it on numerous occasions as a general-coverage camera at 24 fps. For this camera, we also bought a large supply of high-speed film, MS7256 and EF7241, on 400-foot rolls. As it turned out, we didn't use this equipment at 400 fps as much as we thought we would. We discovered that, while you must slow the action enough for the viewer to see it, the whole feel of racing is destroyed if you slow it too much. Where this camera was particularly useful was in getting facial expressions. Bruce wanted to show the fatigue which comes to racers who participate in a Moto-cross race, which is usually run in three 45-minute legs. These men are athletes competing in one of the most physically demanding sports possible, and if the viewer is to share the intensity of competition, he has to read it in the faces of the participants. We often found we could shoot for a mere half-second, filming at 200 frames. This would be enough to show the jarring which riders experience, for example, or the concentration of a racer so en-



(LEFT) Using high-speed Photosonics camera, Brown and Bagley film slow-motion champagne sequence of Grand National champion Gene Romero. (CENTER) Bruce and Bob shoot the breeze with Mert Lawwill, Malcolm Smith and Steve McQueen during break time. (RIGHT) The helicopter filming crew included cameraman Nelson Tyler (inventor of the Tyler Vibrationless Helicopter Mount), producer-director Brown and helicopter pilot Dave Jones.



grossed he is unaware of the saliva running down his chin.

Though Photo-Sonics has since introduced a new version of their 16mm high-speed camera with a reflex system built in, the one we were using was without a reflex viewer. We had a side-mounted view-finder built for us by Century Precision Cine-Optics in North Hollywood. Bruce and I had been getting lenses from these people for the past ten years, as we had found it difficult to locate extra-long lenses in "C" mounts. Generally, we found those from Century were light, super-sharp and fairly economical.

Even with high-speed cameras, wide angle and telephoto lenses, we still could have missed a lot of the action. The plus going for us here was that almost everyone involved with the production is a rider. Bruce rides, and so do I. Don Shoemaker, our editor as well as cameraman, rides. Allen Seymour, who handles both sound and photography, rides. Steve McQueen, who helped finance the picture along with appearing in it, is an experienced rider. All this gave us the advantage of being able to anticipate where the action was going to be. The spectacular crashes in our film could not, of course, be rehearsed and staged as in a studio, but by setting up cameras at spots where we could logically expect these to occur, we got them. We used Miller tripods with fluid heads for this kind of camera positioning.

The hazards of this kind of filming became only too apparent when we almost lost a cameraman at Daytona. Dan Wright set up his camera on the outside of a turn, a good 200 feet from the track. Dan is an experienced sports photographer, and he didn't feel he was stationed in a dangerous spot. What he didn't realize was how fast a machine going 120 miles per hour could cover 200 feet. Two cycles missed the curve, and Dan was caught between them as they spilled. He suffered a severe compound fracture of one leg, a compound fracture of his arm, and a skull fracture.

elbow. He had to be hospitalized, of course, but what could have been a real tragedy fortunately had a happy ending. Dan recovered in time to cover the Trans-Pacific sailboat races, and then went on to Fiji for some more sailboat filming.

Despite its hazards, the pre-positioned camera also had its limitations. Bruce wanted each person in the audience to visualize what his own eyes would see if he were going down the track, passing other riders, bumping into another machine, being passed, glimpsing people in the stands. In other words, of racing by putting the viewer on a bike in the race. The answer to this was

the helmet camera. These are manufactured for Gordon Enterprises by Bell Helmets, and have an adjustable mount for the camera. We usually used two cameras; sometimes one would face forward, the other back, or sometimes both would face forward. The cameras sit about at ear level on the helmet so we modified ours to put the center of gravity lower. This helped, though it was still asking a lot to put this 15-lb. monster on someone's head, and then ask him to go out and do 160 miles per hour in traffic on the banks at Daytona!

The helmet camera uses a 5.7mm or a 10mm lens, and to get a good image size on the screen, you have to get in so

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Brown and Bagley shoot a sequence for "ON ANY SUNDAY". The film took two years to complete and utilized the skills of a score of cameramen. A total of 300,000 feet of 16mm film was shot, with the best of it edited and blown up to 35mm for theatrical distribution.



(LEFT) Streamlined at every possible point, this racing cycle streaks down the track. (CENTER) One of many hazards of the grueling Moto-cross race over the roughest kind of terrain is getting stuck in the mud. (RIGHT) Rounding a curve at full tilt, the motorcycle racer banks sharply and stabilizes himself with one steel-shod foot kicking up the dirt.





Bill and Malcolm Smith swap yarns with actor [Name] in it with them. (RIGHT) The author moves one of the racers.

## "ON ANY SUNDAY"

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close that riders literally have their handle bars locked. Who can do this more effectively than the racers themselves? So this is why a lot of motorcycle racers became additional cameramen. I cannot overemphasize their cooperation; they just knocked themselves out for us. In turn, they became so involved with photography that they would come into our offices to look over with us the footage they had contributed. We gave some, such as Mark Brelsford and Jim Odum, screen credit for photography, but a host of others contributed more than we could acknowledge, among them Mert Lawwill, Frank Gillespie, Don Castro, Dave Smith, Cal Rayborn, Walt Fulton and Gary Nixon.

The problems of filming cross-country motorcycling are completely different from doing professional racing on a track. Nobody, to our knowledge, had ever filmed a desert race. Five hundred to a thousand people form up in a single line ready to go pell-mell over a course of 100 to 150 miles. Bruce thought it would be tremendous if we could do it. If we could hire about twenty cameramen. If we could find the ground men and the Jeeps to transport them and their radio-controlled equipment. If we could afford a helicopter and pilot, all the equipment we would need.

"It would be like filming a war,"

Southern California Mojave Race have elicited praise from reviewers of the film, and much of the credit for this must go to the team of Dave Jones, helicopter pilot, and Nelson Tyler, aerial cameraman. Nelson designed the vibrationless mount he uses, so, naturally he is familiar with it and efficient in its use. In our opinion, these two are tops, and we were fortunate to get them.

As far as equipment was concerned, our only failures were the result of the dirt which is unavoidable with this kind of filming. It was worse than I can describe, however. Understandably, one of our first investments was a good air compressor for blowing the dust out of the cameras—after we had worn out our welcome down at our friendly neighborhood filling station. Eventually, we had a member of our staff devote the majority of his time to cleaning up the equipment every week. Worse than dust was mud. Sometimes we would shoot in streaming rain with the cameramen sloshing around in the mud with Baggies over their cameras and eyepieces so fogged up they couldn't even see. From a visual standpoint, though, we feel the weather difficulties added rather than detracted. For example, the heat waves which distort some scenes were deliberately planned for, as we consider them a very real part of cycling.

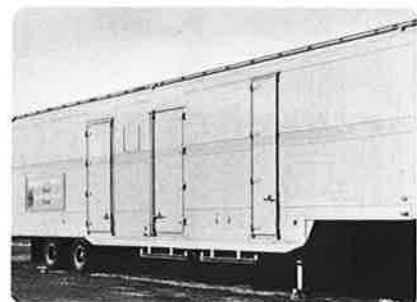
Just the same, it takes a pretty rugged crew to maintain unflagging enthusiasms under some of these conditions, not the least of which is constant travel. We filmed about 17 national races in the U.S., from Bonneville, Utah to Peoria, Ill. or from Sedalia, Mo. to Daytona, Florida. Bruce, Don Shoemaker, and Allen Seymour made several cross-country auto trips with the riders to authenticate the travel hardships. This didn't win them too many points with the wives and families left behind, but the gals suffered through the project with us without too much complaint.

As I said, we accumulated over 300,000 feet of film, but without the capable editing of Bruce and Don, it



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"ON ANY SUNDAY"

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specialty, but also doubles in brass wherever he's needed. Our usual procedure was for the whole group to view the film we had obtained the previous Sunday, discuss it, and decide the principles it represented. Then Don would take the film to his editing table, select appropriate scenes, and have a work-print made. Along with this, he kept a detailed log so we'd know what footage was where.

About this time, we recognized we'd have to face up to a fact of life confronting every independent filmmaker—namely, that making a film is one thing, and selling it another. We made a three-reel 16mm promotional film to show to the distributor and the press at special previews. While we never quite regained the three week's time this required, we are convinced it was a necessary step. Once the distribution aspect was locked up, we could go ahead with the final editing, sound recording, and the 35mm blow-up.

If you are to have professional quality, making the blow-up is not just a simple matter of enlargement, as the color and densities must be balanced and corrected. This is particularly important when the original was shot, as ours was, over a long period of time, under adverse weather and lighting conditions, with a variety of film emulsions (7255, 7256, 7241, 7255), and often with forced development of the film. We selected Cinema Research Corp. to do the job for us, not only because we were so satisfied with the work they did on "ENDLESS SUMMER", but also because they offer a complete range of service. We could save time and maintain greater control in getting our titles and special effects done along with the blow-up.

Except for Don, we are not very technically-oriented people, but we were impressed with the equipment Cinema Research had acquired since "ENDLESS SUMMER". Their Eastman Color Analyzer proved invaluable, as we could work closely with their crew and actually see and select the color values we preferred. These could be translated precisely to the optical printer, as the Bell & Howell additive head identically matches the color analyzer with very minute increments of color balancing, and the vibrationless electronic drive gives better quality. Since our picture was enlarged to a 1:85-1 ratio instead of the normal 1:33-1, it was sometimes necessary for Cinema Research to scan or crop some frames to re-center the

image optically for the correct framing. They also worked closely with the Technicolor people to assure us quality release prints.

When it came to making the sound track, Don had a lot of innovating to do in matching the action with appropriate sound. When you watch a cycle on film, you have every right to expect that the sound will increase in volume as the machine approaches and diminish as it goes by. This is not the case; the actual sound, coming out the back of the motorcycle, gets loud and stays loud. The viewer is unaware that he is watching slowed motion a lot of the time, as to his eye it is still incredibly fast. Much of the time, therefore, sync-sound, done when the action was filmed, was unsatisfactory. We had hired Bill Amberg, who has his own producing company, to help us with both sound and camera work, and he had some suggestions. We tried radio-controlled mikes, wireless mikes, playing the track backwards, positioning the mike on the opposite side of the racing track, but nothing quite worked. In the end, we found the most authentic sound was obtained by putting a Nagra recorder on a racer, taping a mike under his leathers, and having him go out and get the appropriate sound for us. Frequently, Don and I spent hours trying to duplicate sound effects for a single scene.

Bruce's very personalized narration is, of course, the sound the audience remembers best, but we also felt a musical track would enhance the picture's values. However, the problem here was one of communication. We felt we lacked the proper terminology to describe what we were after to someone used to working in the major studios. Bruce, though, had heard some music by Dominic Frontiere which he liked, and when we commissioned this man to do our music, the communication problem evaporated. The entire score was written, arranged, conducted and recorded by Dominic, and I have never seen such total commitment. We owe a lot to him.

"Commitment", though, is the magic word in making a picture such as ours. If I have given the impression that every moment was sweetness-and-light, big-happy-family, never-a-cross-word sort of thing, that is naturally an exaggeration. However, we are a tightly-knit group with a tremendous enthusiasm and a genuine affection for the entire motor-cycling fraternity. If our picture achieves the success we hope it will, it is because a bunch of guys were dedicated enough to work 'round the clock if necessary on any Sunday. Or any other day of the week. ■

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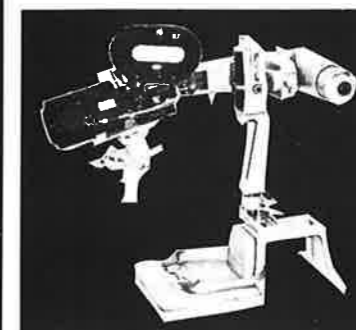
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