

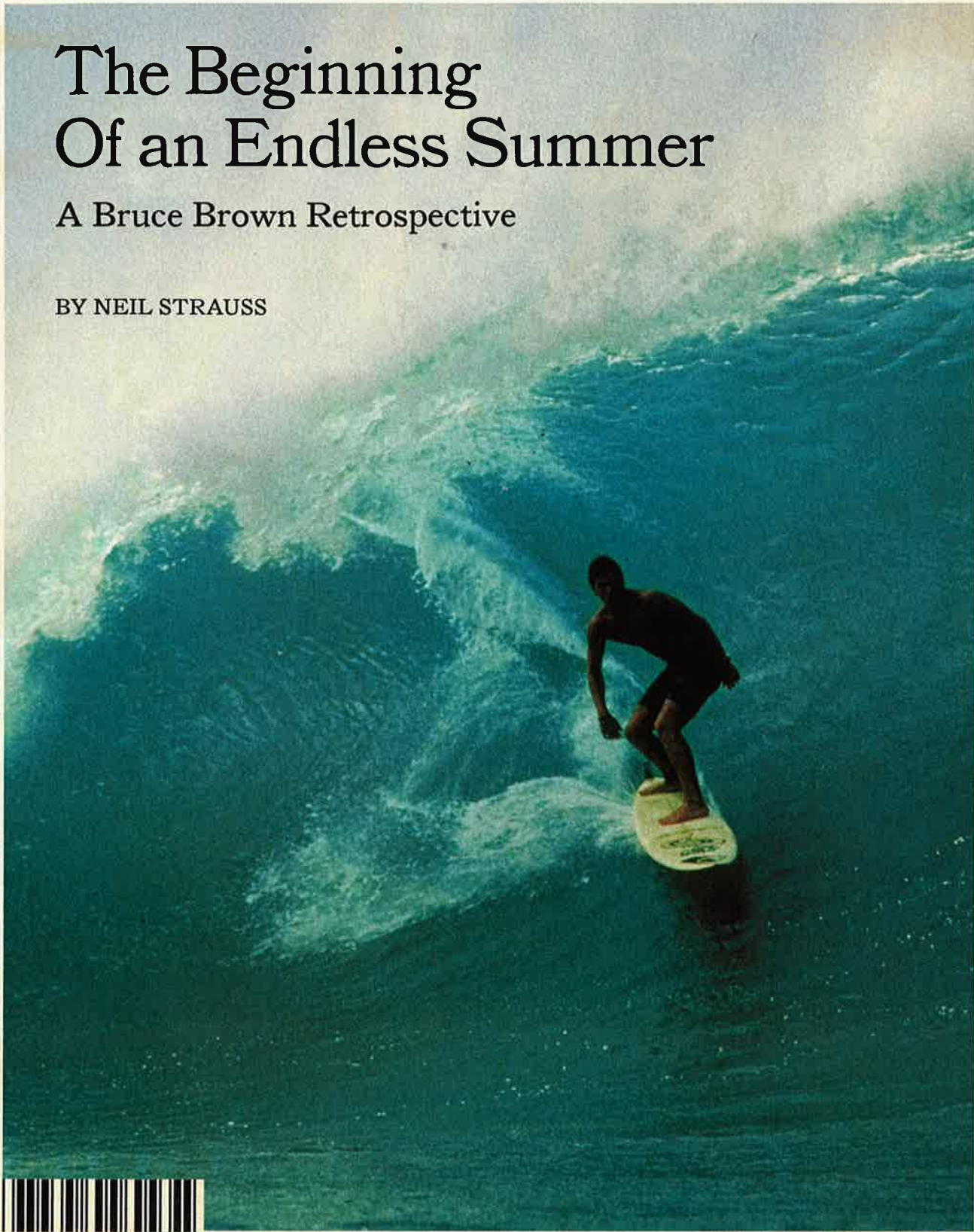
Television

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The Beginning Of an Endless Summer

A Bruce Brown Retrospective

BY NEIL STRAUSS



Surf's Up, Dude. Hang On to Your Couch.



Photograph of Bruce Brown by Kyle Christy/TBS; all others courtesy of Bruce Brown Films

By NEIL STRAUSS

POP culture in the United States often seems to vacillate between East and West Coast dominance. And right now, thanks in part to the popularity of sports like skateboarding and surfing, Southern California is back in the spotlight with a vengeance. On MTV, acts like Incubus and Sheryl Crow try to show off their surfing moves in videos. In theaters, the documentary "Dogtown and Z-Boys," about Los Angeles surf and skateboard culture, just finished a well-reviewed run, only to be replaced by "Blue Crush," a feature about women who surf that is said to be the biggest-budget surf movie in history. And "Girl in the Curl," intended to appeal to teenyboppers, is in the works at Paramount. Meanwhile, the surf clothing industry continues to grow, taking in some \$2.4 billion a year.

Bruce Brown, a pioneer in filming renegade sports, has watched the surfing craze wax and wane for almost half a century, riding the first big wave in 1958, when he made the feature-length documentary "Slippery When Wet." His was not the independent-film world of cleverly scripted and artfully photographed features like "Reservoir Dogs" and "Buffalo '66." Before his breakthrough in the 60's with "The Endless Summer," Mr. Brown typically showed his work at theaters and halls

TCM SPOTLIGHT:
BRUCE BROWN
Sunday nights at 9
on Turner Classic Movies

On the cover: A surfer rides the pipeline in Hawaii.

he had rented, where he played his one and only print of a film while providing the narration live. These were films made by a surfer for other surfers. Sure, there were elements of drama, philosophy, character development and comedy, but their most poetic element was the water and their main character the curling wave.

There seems to be nothing Mr. Brown relishes more than filming surfers as they cruise in the curl — something viewers can see for themselves on "TCM Spotlight: Bruce Brown," a retrospective of Mr. Brown's early works shown every Sunday night in August, starting tonight with "The Endless Summer," at 9, and "Slippery When Wet," at 10:45.

Seven surfing movies, one collection of surfing shorts (Aug. 25 at 9 p.m. on TCM) and the Oscar-nominated dirt-biking movie "On Any Sunday" (Aug. 25 at 10 p.m.) may not be a lot to show for a filmmaking career that began so many decades ago. But Mr. Brown has his reasons, and chief among them is that he loves surfing too much to be filming it all the time.

"Guys who made surf films and surfed, their films weren't very good, because they didn't spend enough time on the beach filming," said Mr. Brown, who, at 64, has stopped surfing temporarily to race rally cars with his wife while his son, Dana, works on his own forthcoming surf movie, "Step Into Liquid." "When the surf was good, it was my job to film it. I'd be climbing up a



The Endless Summer

On any day of the year it's summer somewhere in the world. Bruce Brown's latest color film highlights the adventures of two young American surfers, Robert August and Mike Hynson who follow their everlasting summer around the world. Their unique expedition takes them to Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, Mexico and California. Share their experiences as they search the world for that perfect wave which may be forming just over the next horizon. **BRUCE BROWN FILMS**

hill when it's all hot, carrying the camera, trying to get a wide shot. I kept telling myself that people are going to pay a dollar to go see this movie, so it's my obligation to do this."

When Mr. Brown first started making surf films, he was in a field unto himself. A year after being discharged from the Navy in 1957, he was working as a lifeguard in San Clemente, Calif., when a local surf entrepreneur, Dale Velzy, hired him to go to Hawaii and make a movie promoting the Velzy surf team. "If I hadn't done that, I might still be lifeguarding in San Clemente," he said.

Before leaving for Hawaii, Mr. Brown



A scene from "Water Logged" (opposite page, top), a 1962 film by Bruce Brown (below, in a 2002 photograph). Top right, a surfwear advertisement congratulates Mr. Brown for "The Endless Summer." The remaining posters were used to publicize three of Mr. Brown's films.

prepared for his first film by buying a book on how to make movies. His budget was \$5,000 (including living expenses). He didn't use telephoto lenses, and he focused his two cameras by hand. "We did it that way because we didn't know any better," he said. "Fortunately I didn't have any training because then I would have learned that I couldn't do what I had been doing. After several years I had a call to go speak at a college film



school, and it was like a comedy routine. Every time I told them how I did something, they'd laugh."

When they asked about using work prints of a film, Mr. Brown said that he didn't have one, that he just edited and screened the master copy of the film. "They would say, 'How did you edit it if you didn't have a work print?'" he recalled. "And I told them I'd crank it through the viewer and then close my eyes where I thought a cut should be. And then I'd crank it four turns or so to where the next shot was, try and visualize the cut, and then cut it. Once it was cut, that was it."

"A splice would always come apart when we were showing it," he continued. "My wife was running the projector, and she had a bunch of tape and would fix it while it was still running. The music was played on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. If it fell out of sync, I'd stick my finger on it to crank it up or slow it down. When a scene faded, I'd pause the tape recorder, then start it up again. And somehow it just worked."

Mr. Brown's voice-overs, a defining element of his films, were originally spoken as live accompaniment to the movies. After showing a film as many as 70 times and calibrating the audience reaction, he'd refine all his comments and jokes like a stand-up comedian. Sometimes he would completely change the film between showings, removing unpopular scenes or adding new ones. Often, bands would play during show intermissions. One of these acts was a new group called the Beach Boys, who, Mr. Brown recalled, were so atrocious at the time that they were booed by the audience. "I felt sorry for them," Mr. Brown recalled. "I thought they weren't going to make it."

But, as the Beach Boys surprised Mr. Brown with their first No. 1 single in 1964, he surprised himself that same year with the success of "The Endless Summer," in which Mr. Brown, wind-up Bolex camera in hand, and two other surfers travel to distant lands, including Africa and New Zealand, to claim particular beaches in the name of surfing.



HANG-TEN SURFS The Endless Summer Around the World
Hang-Ten surfwear available in men's and boys sizes

Congratulations to Bruce Brown for the surfing movie of the year



After receiving a thunderous reaction at the film's first showings, Mr. Brown tried to expand his audience beyond surfers and the surf-curious. "We rented a theater in Wichita, Kan., two weeks in the middle of winter in a snowstorm, and it broke all the theater records," he recalled. "We thought that would prove the film to the distributors in New York, and of course it didn't. So we rented a theater in New York ourselves, hoping that the distributors would drive by the theater and see the crowd, which they did. It was the surfer guys against the New York establishment."

And, he concluded, the surfer guys won. □