

"Who would have thought the outback was wheelchair accessible?"

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One liner

Four men ditch their wheelchairs for a quad bike adventure, traversing the rugged terrain of their tragic past.

One paragraph synopsis

Strap yourself in as four Aussie blokes swap wheelchairs for quad bikes and embark on the ride of their lives. This documentary charts their 5000km adventure across the outback, as they visit the crash sites where their lives changed forever. Three men are paraplegics and one a quadriplegic, making this no ordinary road movie. Their encounters with mud, deserts, floods and exhaustion test their resilience and endurance to breaking point. Fuelled by bold humour and disarming honesty, The Ride is a wild traverse across the terrain of the human spirit, as four men make peace with the tragedy of their past.



THE RIDE



One page synopsis

Imagine being sixteen and you can't even pick up a can of coke.

After an accident changes everything, how do you rebuild your life?

The Ride is an observational adventure film set in the picturesque expanse of outback Australia. It documents a journey both literal and emotional as four men swap their wheelchairs for quad bikes and return to the crash sites where tragedy struck. It is a heartfelt story of resilience, laughter and survival as they strive to accept the reality of a life interrupted.

50-year-old Jim is gregarious and jovial. But behind his exuberant personality lies a determination to confront his past and, as he puts it, 'put the whole thing to bed'.

41-year-old Anton, a curious bohemian type, is on his 'last hurrah'. Halfway through the trip, Anton will marry his fiancé, pregnant with twins. His nomadic life of adventure is about to change pace.

Best mates Terry, 44, and Craig, 45, met 29 years ago in hospital. Like 'the odd couple', Craig is regal, dignified and introspective, whilst Terry is witty and vivacious.

As the only quadriplegic in the group, Craig has about 8 working muscles in his entire body. An ex-motorcross rider, for Craig, this is all about the ride, pushing himself out of his comfort zone and feeling the freedom of his youth. Compared to wheelchairs, Quad bikes are like agile racing cars and after years of confinement, it's time to feel the wind in his hair again.

As the men hurtle across the outback, the endless banter, one-up-man-ship and camaraderie reveals a hilarious insight into the subculture of disability. Delving into the most private parts of their lives, the men speak candidly about sex, marriage and catheters.

At each of their crash sites, we witness an intense vulnerability as they face the demons of their past. We explore the moment they knew they would never walk again, what they lost and how they got from the most tragic point of their lives to where they are today.

In the final act, torrential rains flood the Simpson Desert and lakes appear where there hasn't been water for 30 years. To reach the final crash site, the men must make an all night dash to Birdsville across the flooded Simpson desert. In a race against time, they face a struggle that can only be won with sheer will and painful endurance.

With bold and unpredictable humour, the men take us on a fast and furious 5000km ride. Delving into their darkest days, they share an inspirational story about the capacity of the human spirit to make peace with the tragedy of the past.



THE RIDE



Bio - Sandra Cook – Producer and Director

Sandra's mission in life is to have adventures with meaning. Her favourite saying is "How can I make this work?". She was attracted to this story because it had all the key ingredients – tragedy, triumph and a love story. The idea of going into the outback and visiting isolated parts of Australia appealed to her sense of adventure.

Sandra began working in the film industry after several years exploring developing countries. After a stint of hitchhiking on yachts, Sandra ended up in Mexico on the user-end of an underwater camera. This experience inspired her to go back to Australia and study the craft of filmmaking in her hometown of Adelaide.

Since then, Sandra has worked on the feature documentaries *The Burning Season* (2008, in Borneo), *Show Me the Magic* (2012, in New Zealand), and *Two Degrees* (Upcoming, in Papua New Guinea) as well as freelancing in film & TV camera departments. Sandra has also produced custom content for Discovery Channel (USA) and Tourism Australia.

In 2010, Sandra created a multi-platform award winning documentary project for people affected by road trauma called *Journey Beyond Road Trauma* (www.journeybeyondroadtrauma.org). This online community allows people to connect with others, tell their story, and campaign for road safety and positive change.

When she's not on location (and sometimes, when she is) Sandra enjoys being underwater, thinking about traveling, and watching movies with happy endings.



THE RIDE



Bio - Jim Cairns – Executive Producer

Jim Cairns is both the executive producer of The Ride and one of the featured characters. He has a unique command of the English language and is renowned for his one-liners; his favourite sayings are "Let's make it happen!" and "I'm onto it like a fat rat", followed by "You've got to piss out of the dick you got".

Jim was the mastermind behind the trip and the driving force that pulled it all together. He wanted to make a documentary of the adventure to raise awareness about what people with a disability can do, so he teamed up with Sandra to help him realise his vision. Prior to his diversion into filmmaking, for many years Jim was the WA General Manager of Operations for Caterpillar. Jim is married to the wonderful Marianne and has two beautiful children.





Bio - Susan MacKinnon –Executive Producer

Susan MacKinnon is a passionate advocate for the documentary industry. She has worked as an independent producer for more than 20 years, winning numerous international awards and much critical acclaim for her documentaries. Susan was attracted to this project because of the courage and appeal of the four men making the journey; she felt that sharing their stories would be an inspiration to others.

Susan’s credits include the recently completed feature documentary Paul Kelly: Stories of Me, Life In Movement, The Oasis, and In The Company Of Actors. Other films include Honey Bee Blues, Global Haywire (by Academy Award winner Bruce Petty), 4 (directed by Tim Slade), Over My Dead Body (directed by Ian Walker), Men And Their Sheds (directed by James Manche), Eternity (about the enigmatic Arthur Stace, directed by Lawrence Johnston), Somewhere Between Light And Reflection, and You Must Remember This (an expose about Alzheimer’s Disease).

Susan’s very popular short drama, Fetch, screened at over fifty festivals worldwide, including in Official Competition at the International Festival du Cannes. From 1998 to 2005, Susan was the Documentary Investment Manager at the Film Finance Corporation Australia (FFC), where she assisted filmmakers in negotiating finances for their documentaries. During this time, Susan financed over 400 productions and helped internationalise the Australian documentary industry.



THE RIDE



Director's Statement by Sandra Cook

When Jim Cairns (Executive Producer and one of the main characters in The Ride) asked me to make a film about the expedition, I was instantly drawn to the project. I was intrigued and inspired by the concept of four 'broken' men making such an ambitious trek to confront their past. I felt the story had many dynamic and exciting elements – heartbreaking stories of loss, a cautionary tale, and extreme adventure travel... all against a backdrop of survival and resilience. The fact that one of the characters was getting married along the way meant that it would be a love story too!

The timeframe was incredibly tight, with just two weeks to pull together a crew together and go. I had just finished my previous project and was in Northern NSW for a well-earned vacation. My vacation turned into pre-production and I interviewed the four main characters and their wives over the phone. When I asked Eileen - Craig, the quadriplegic's wife - to describe him, the first word she said was 'sporty'. Call me naïve, but I couldn't grasp how someone confined to a wheelchair with limited arm movement could be described as 'sporty'. I was hooked; I wanted to learn more. I knew I had to make the journey to Perth and find out what these men were all about.

The Ride is a road movie unlike any other: it's a "boy's own adventure", a turbocharged travel story, and an intensely personal cathartic journey reflecting on the past. Through character confessions, we delve into their darker days, and relive what it was like to become disabled. We also explore the other consequences surrounding it, such as sex, finding a life partner and dealing with catheters. The audience is given an insight into their worlds and the film breaks down the barrier between able bods and those with disabilities.



THE RIDE



Director's Statement by Sandra Cook cont.

The men are honest, open and vulnerable, whilst also being bold, funny, and profound. Above all, they are determined to show that despite the impact their accidents, they are not defined by their disability but by their enormous strength of character.

The Ride takes place in some of Australia's harshest yet most visually stunning locations. We made our way through rarely travelled parts of the country with an initial crew of two; myself and Conan (camera). We worked 24/7 in a complex, challenging and ever-changing environment. Our biggest challenges turned out to be keeping up with the men – the trip was fast, furious and relentless. Recording sound without a sound recordist is a complete nightmare when you have four characters, helmets, and the constant background noise of bike engines. We also had to deal with delicate laptops, cameras and hard drives in a technologically unfriendly environment where dust is unforgiving and everywhere.

The very real threat of danger from the Australian environment created the perfect piece of third act drama. Who could have imagined the Simpson Desert would flood and threaten to prevent our gang from reaching the final, climactic crash site?

Refusing to be broken by insurmountable odds, the heroes of The Ride ultimately offered the most inspiring of adventure tales as they strove to make peace with the tragedies that forever changed their lives.



THE RIDE



Executive Producer statement - Jim Cairns

In 2008, I met up with some other hand cyclists who were also in wheelchairs due to spinal injuries. We began having regular rides together on Saturday mornings around Perth, which we called the Coffee Run.

While having coffee during one of these rides, I mentioned to the others that my bucket list included returning to my desert crash site, near Birdsville, Queensland. Craig Parsons, a quadriplegic, mentioned that going to Uluru in Central Australia was on his list.

The project was born.

We were both motorcycle riders at the time of our crashes which led to the idea of doing it on quad bikes - Craig had previously obtained a special disability license to use his quad on the road.

We met at Craig's business, drank wine and mapped out a plan. Where possible, the route followed dirt roads, and took us deep into the outback. Two other disabled men - Anton Zappelli and Terry Mader - heard about the adventure and joined us. It was agreed that we should film the trip as a documentary.

As a group, we wanted to make a documentary to highlight the potential impact of motor vehicle accidents to your body, family, employment and future potential. We thought this was important because all of us, at one time, had to completely rebuild our lives.

We needed to find money to make the film and had some success in fundraising. We acquired the bare minimum to film the trip, but not enough for editing. Time was running short and, two weeks before we left, using social media, we linked up with a South Australian producer named Sandra Cook. Sandra and I hit it off straight away. She was passionate about our story as she had been affected by road trauma when her father was killed in a car crash. Amazingly, Sandra made it happen and on the 8th of August 2010, we left with Sandra and cameraman Conan Fitzpatrick.

The trip was timed so I would be on my crash site on the 25th Anniversary of my crash. I had just turned 50, so it was significant to me because it represented 25 years in, and 25 years out, of a wheelchair. I had spent about 15 years trying to find the site and had just found the one person who knew where it was - the policeman who held my head until the helicopter evacuated me in 1985. He had retired to a station in the North of Queensland and committed to driving 12 hours to Birdsville to show me where it was.

The trip turned out to be more than we could have expected. The mobility of quad bikes allowed us to see and experience things that we thought impossible beforehand. For example, the Simpson Desert flooded and we were forced to cross it in a single day where normally people take 3-4 days to cross it.

We hope the completed documentary has achieved most of our original goals, and above all else, inspire others to make the best of the life they have. I hope you enjoy.



THE RIDE



FAQs – Sandra Cook

1. How did you get involved with the project?

Peter Thurmer, Director of Adelaide's MAPS Film School, brought the story to my attention. The guys had already decided to make the doco, but were missing a producer. I contacted Jim Cairns and went from there...

2. As a filmmaker, what drew you to the subject of disability and road safety / trauma?

In 2004, my father was killed in a car crash. I was made acutely aware of the lack of support available for people affected by road trauma. In 2010 I launched an online documentary project for people affected by road trauma called Journey Beyond Road Trauma www.journeybeyondroadtrauma.org The space allows people to tell their stories and connect with others. I'd just launched the project when I heard about Jim and the others. To be honest, dealing with more subject matter on road trauma was the last thing I wanted to do. But, this story isn't about road trauma. It's an adventure story about people overcoming extreme obstacles. That appealed to me from the onset. Once I got to know the men, I became really interested in disability and the challenges they face daily to live the lives most of us take for granted.

3. As well as directing, what other jobs did you do on the film?

For most of the shoot there was only two crew – myself and Conan Fitzpatrick on camera. We both did everything!!! This includes recording sound, wrangling footage at night, managing the production, organizing and cleaning the gear and workspace (we worked in the back of the Oka truck). Each night we set up a desk for hard drives and laptops, and downloaded and reviewed the footage while our gear and batteries charged. Logistically, this shoot was a nightmare. We worked 24/7, non-stop. We had some help from Jim's brother, Andy, who dealt with the helmet cameras and downloaded that footage every night. Jim's friend Rex also helped us with generators, cables and lots of the little things. An Irish back packer called Lyndsay came on the trip too, she would bring us food and supplies. We didn't have time to look after ourselves – everything centered on capturing the story and keeping the shoot going.



THE RIDE



FAQs – Sandra Cook cont.

4. What was the most challenging experience on the shoot?

Dealing with the fatigue knowing there would be no time-out. In documentary, you have to control the environment to some extent. We shot the majority of this in an observational style, with little interruption of the subjects. However, questions still need to be asked e.g. can you turn off your engine (so the sound works) or can I put on your radio mic? People get tired of film crews asking them to do things. Normally on a shoot, you're only filming people for a few days, when subjects get sick of the film making process it's generally over. This wasn't like that; there was no break. We spent five weeks with these people, non-stop. People grew tired of both the process and what we needed to do to 'get' the story. No matter how many times you explain why things need to be performed in a certain way, people outside the industry don't understand, because it's not their job... it's just an extra hassle!

5. What was the most moving experience on the shoot?

Going to Anton's crash site. It was one of the most amazing things I've witnessed in my life. The light was beautiful and the wind was howling through the trees. It was the perfect 'set'. When we arrived, Anton told his story from beginning to end. It was emotive, fascinating and told completely from his heart. Anton is a natural storyteller and he spoke for just under an hour. Afterwards, I felt like I had been somewhere. The footage was amazing, we could have used any part of it and it would have been perfect. Plus, the sound worked... we were lucky; with that wind and no sound recordist... what a relief... if we missed the sound we would have missed the entire scene!

6. What did you learn from the men of the ride?

No matter what happens in life you can rise up from it. Life is all about choice. So choose it.

