



Cycling Cinema:

The Rise of MTB Biking Videos

by James Hart

Interest in mountain biking has certainly been picking up. Sydney's hilly landscape and close proximity to forest land provide many opportunities for trail riding for both beginner and seasoned enthusiasts. In 2000, the Sydney Olympics was the second ever Olympic games to feature mountain biking as an official sport, and its participation on the world stage helped increase its exposure, both abroad and in Australia.

MTB videos have begun to emerge in recent years as cameras and equipment have become more portable and affordable. Photos courtesy of GoPro.com.

This increased enthusiasm in mountain biking has also created an unexpected surge in another kind of hobby: following the staggering advances in filming and editing technology, bicycle videos have emerged all across the internet as riders have begun to film their favourite rides.

Many of Sydney's trails have been featured in videos—Manly Dam most notably—but riders are also showcasing sites like Hornsby Heights, Stromlo Forrest and the many trails in the Blue Mountains. The uploaded videos vary in quality and production, but all are posted by riders who feel compelled to share their experience with others.

“I make the vids for fun and upload them to share the mountain biking experience with riding mates and non riders alike,” said 30-year-old Nik McClenaughan, who has covered rides in Wandandian and Lucas Heights in several videos. “I wouldn't say I take it too seriously, it's just about showing fun days out on the bike.”

Pete Boyd said that he mostly makes and watches videos to tide himself over in between rides.

“I've a two-year-old child to look after so it's fun to be able to watch and edit video when I can't get out for a ride or when the weather's rubbish,” he said. His YouTube channel features many videos of Manly and the Knapsack Reserve.

As better hardware equipment becomes available and riders acquaint themselves with the technology, the quality of the videos continues to increase.

“A couple of years ago I tried attaching a digital camera to my helmet for fun and things have grown into a bit of a hobby since then,” said Shane Hunter, who has recorded several of his runs through Piles Creek and Pearl Beach. “Over the past couple years I've learned a lot and enjoy trying different techniques.”

In the early years of online video, bike films were jittery, pixelated and hard to follow. But as interest in making videos grew, companies have raced to develop better equipment for their growing market.

Far from the portable cameras of ages past, most of these sports cameras come with features specifically designed for their use on the trail. Most are shock- and water-resistant, and can shoot in various HD modes, up to 1080p and 60 frames per second. Some allow users to store their media on SD cards, allowing for up to nine hours of uncut video. If the housing or lens gets damaged during a crash, replacement kits sell for under \$40.

Many models are available from brands such as Contour, Oregon Scientific and Techyon, but the most popular brand among bike riders appears to be the GoPro.

“I mainly use two GoPro HD’s but also use a cheap Panasonic 720p,” Hunter said. Boyd said that he uses his GoPro along with various chest and handlebar mounts.

But it’s not just the hardware that’s improved over the years. Riders may now choose from a wide array of video editing software to touch up their films before posting them online.

Hunter said that he uses Sony Vegas to edit and render many of his clips. “I also have DashWare software to import my Garmin info onto video, but I haven’t done much with it,” he said.

McClenaughan said that he prefers using Windows Movie Maker for most of his videos. “It’s very basic,” he said, “but it allows me to do what I need to do.”

“Editing is done with iMovie, mainly because it comes free with new Macs,” Boyd said of his own videos. “I’ve looked at Adobe Premier and downloaded a 30-day trial but even Elements is overkill for what I want to do.”



Biking film festivals are even starting to form as amateur videographers look for venues to showcase their work. Photo courtesy of GoPro.com.

Interest in sports videos has grown so much that independent film festivals are starting to form, as video makers look for venues to showcase their work. In 2001, Brendt Barbur started the Bike Film Festival in New York City to “celebrate the bicycle through music, art, and of course, film,” he said. Last year, the festival ran almost one hundred bicycle films, from two minutes long to near feature-length. The Bicycle Film Festival reaches Sydney on 13 October.



In addition to hardware, video editing software has given riders incredible versatility in showcasing their favourite rides. Photo courtesy of GoPro.com.

Both video recording hardware and its editing software have come a long way since the start of YouTube, but their capabilities continue to grow as riders find new ways to use their devices.

“I have just built a flying fox trolley for my GoPros so I’m looking forward to good weather to experiment,” Hunter said. “I plan on making more vids in the future and refining my skills.”

“I’m getting more sophisticated,” Boyd said, “synching to music, etc., but it all depends on how much time I have.”