

## The World's Fastest Indian

**A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor. (Originally written for New Zealand, Methodist Taonga, November 2005. Reprinted with their permission.)**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 2005, Invercargill rolled out their red carpet for the world premiere of "The World's Fastest Indian." The movie is based on the true story of local man, Burt Munro, whose love of speed is expressed in a dream of testing his classic 1920 Indian motorcycle on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, USA.

The movie starts with Burt making home-grown pistons in a concrete block shed in Invercargill and follows his journey through United States customs, to the speed-flats of Utah. Overcoming numerous obstacles, Burt sets a new land speed record. He would return to Bonneville nine times and his 1967 world record remains unbroken to this day.

The movie follows a somewhat predictable plot; good guy overcoming adversity through ingenuity. Yet the movie is brought to life in the character of Burt Munro (splendidly acted by Anthony Hopkins), the obstacles he overcomes and the larger than life characters he meets along the way. I confess to a tear in my eye as Burt rings Invercargill (collect of course) to announce his triumph.

"The World's Fastest Indian" has a universal appeal as it explores the meaning of life. Facing old age and health problems, Burt wants to live for his dreams. "You love more in five minutes flat out than most people live in a life time," he announces to his bank manager. The movie details an almost sacred experience as Burt arrives at his Holy Grail, the speed-flats of Utah. As Burt recites a list of previous world speed champions, we hear a liturgy of the saints and catch a glimpse of the religiosity of those who live for the God of Speed.

At the same time, "The World's Fastest Indian" is a uniquely Kiwi story. You know you are looking at a New Zealand movie when you see an original concrete block shed perched on a quarter acre in Invercargill and witness the acting debut of Tim Shadbolt. The movie is directed by New Zealander, Roger Donaldson, famous for classic New Zealand movies "Sleeping Dogs" and "Smash Palace" and international hits including "Dante's Peak" and "Thirteen Days."

So what do we as Kiwi's see when we look at ourselves in the cinematic mirror? Burt Munro is a battler, stoic in the face of pain, who can perform miracles with no. 8 wire and a soldering iron. What he lacks in social graces he makes up for through his willingness to accept people at face value. In the cinematic mirror we catch a glimpse of the stereotypical Kiwi amalgam of Barry Crump and Man Alone.

So what might take the Kiwi viewer by surprise? Well, a discerning friend of mine noted that this was a feel good movie. Gone are the dark, foreboding images that haunt so much of New Zealand film. Instead we celebrate the success of down-under triumph.

You will read this review in November. Your ears will soon be ringing with the Advent invitation and the dreams of Mary's Magnificent. Down-under success is promised. Yet it will emerge not from ingenuity of the Man Alone, nor in service to the God of Speed, but from the trusting acts of faithful woman.

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