

SPEEDVILLE

Inside the racing village

Innovative sports-reality documentary series — 6 x 60'



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Behind every motorsport there's an itinerant village, a caravanserai on a pilgrimage for glory, moving from track to track before materializing in another paddock in another country on another continent. Like any village, folk come and folk go, but some spend their entire working lives here searching for their own personal Holy Grail, be that a pat on the back or a World Championship trophy. Like any village, Speedville has its characters that everyone knows. But the characters with the most interesting stories to tell are not necessarily the ones who get the glory.

OUTLINE

Speedville is about the goings-on, the triumphs and the travails of the racing village. It tells the stories of the men and women who make the on-track fireworks happen.

Speedville documents the lives of a limited number of key characters throughout the course of a season. Crucially for a reality documentary series, our characters are approachable, ordinary people, largely from working class backgrounds, who happen to live extraordinary lives and do remarkable jobs. These are people we can identify with, aspire to be, cheer for and cry for—people worthy of our involvement in time and investment in emotion. The competitive, unpredictable and stressful environment in which they work is the perfect furnace in which to forge **great original television**.

Speedville shows us a side of sport we've never seen before, enabling us to appreciate the psychology and physiology of young men who risk their lives for glory, and the motivations of the men and women who's work enables them to do it. We're with them on the road, on aeroplanes, in the pit box, in hospitality and in motorhomes. We're at work and at play. We're there from the early morning drive to the circuit until the late night getaway. We're at physiotherapy. We're at the medical centre. We're at training sessions. We're at racer briefings. We're with the technicians as they rebuild a damaged machine overnight. We're with the fitters as they change hundreds of tyres. We're with the race director as he tries to mollify a pack of irate journalists. We're with the chefs as they prepare fine dining for 100 VIP guests from a tiny kitchen. We're with the grid girls as they strut their stuff. We're with the team manager as he struggles to get his machines and equipment through customs in time to make the event and we're with the racer's girlfriends while their men are risking life and limb.

Rather than being outside the sport watching racers and their machines going round and around a track, we're inside the sport looking out at the crowds.

Every other weekend between March and November, an itinerant village assembles in one of 18 locations around the world. It travels from the deserts of the Arabian Gulf to the vast skies of Texas; from the Argentinean pampas to the ochre hills of Andalusia; from the tulip fields of Holland to the rolling countryside of Tuscany to the wheat fields of Northamptonshire, and then back and forth across Europe before flying to the

paddy fields of rural Japan, the palm plantations of Malaysia and to a windswept island off the coast of Queensland; finally ending the year in the Valencian hinterland.

It's a village like no other, with more than 1,800 inhabitants drawn from all over the world by a quest for glory. The elders are Catalan, English, Italian, French and Japanese but the lingua franca here is English. Like any village, folk come and folk go, but some have spent most of their lives here. Like any village, it has its characters that everybody knows. But the characters with the most interesting stories in the MotoGP paddock, the racing village, are not necessarily the ones who get the glory.

Speedville is a reality television series that goes inside the motorcycle racing Grand Prix paddock to find out what makes it the most complex and thrilling of sports by telling the stories of the people who make it happen.

The FIM Road Racing World Championship Grand Prix is the pinnacle of motorcycle sport, the two-wheeled equivalent of Formula 1 but more down-to-earth. There are three classes: MotoGP (1,000cc), Moto2 (600cc) and Moto3 (250cc). All three classes use four-stroke engines. The elite MotoGP class machines are faster than Formula 1 cars, typically exceeding 210mph (338kph) on the straightaways.

Grand Prix motorcycles are purpose-built prototype racing machines that are not available for purchase by the general public and cannot be ridden legally on public roads. This contrasts with the various production-based categories of racing such as the Superbike World Championship (SBK) that feature modified versions of road-going motorcycles available to the public.

With a 62-year history, MotoGP is the oldest motor sport World Championship. It comprises 18 rounds in 13 countries spanning 4 continents (12 events are in Europe).

We can already see all of the on-track action in the 10 hours of live coverage produced in-house from each event by Dorna Sports, the television and commercial rights holder. The show is broadcast on 84 networks (currently by BT Sport in the UK with highlights on ITV4) to a global audience of 300 million. Schedules are tight and airtime is limited. Racetracks all look like a ribbon of tarmac in tight shots so we don't get much of a sense of place or context. We might see some of what happens in the pit lane, a little of the pit boxes and the starting grid before the race, but the focus, naturally, is on the racing or the television presenters. We get reaction shots, say of team members or a girlfriend reacting to a rider crashing out, but we don't see the behind-the-scenes human stories that will make this sport seem fascinating even to viewers who are not racing fans and don't ride motorcycles themselves.

Speedville is not so much about what the riders do on the track as about the contribution made by the rest of the paddock to what the riders do on the track.

The MotoGP paddock is the biggest racing village in motor sport. Behind the pit boxes there's a line of immaculate, brightly coloured trailer units, which transport the teams' machinery, spare parts and equipment and expand into mobile offices. At the end of

the High Street are the mobile headquarters of Dorna and the teams' organisation, IRTA. On the other side of the street are the luxurious hospitality units in which chefs prepare breakfast and lunch for sponsors and their guests. Behind those are the team refectories and public relations units. In the back streets we find the mobile workshops and offices of the tyre companies, suspension companies, brake companies, racing suit companies, helmet companies and equipment suppliers. On the edge of the village are the American-built luxury RVs of the elite riders and, beyond that, the European-built camper vans of the riders coming up through the Moto2 and Moto3 classes. To one side of the paddock is the huge outside broadcast TV compound with the commentary booths located on the main straight or in the grandstand.

The pit building typically houses the media centre, home to more than 300 journalists, scrutineering, where the bikes are checked for compliance with the sporting rules, the offices of the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM), the Swiss-based sanctioning body, the Stewards' Room and Race Direction, the places where tough calls have to be made in an instant. The VIP Village, a luxury corporate hospitality area for premium guests and VIPs, is typically sited on the roof of the pits building.

Beside the track is the circuit medical centre, where, aside from medical emergencies, randomly selected riders are drug tested after each race, often a protracted and comedic affair since it is difficult to give a urine sample after an hour of physical exertion, sweating into a leather suit in searing hot temperatures.

Speedville takes us into the places the fans never see to give us an understanding of the sport from an insider's perspective. Sometimes we're involved in the off-track action, observing Rossi's engineers, technicians and mechanics as they transform his 'feel' into the perfect set-up during practice (the physics of a motorcycle are more complicated than a car since a bike has to be leant into corners rather than be stuck to the road by downforce), or working late into the night to rebuild a mangled bike. We share their elation when he gets a result and their disappointment when he doesn't. We share their tensions, their worry when he crashes, their personal dramas and conflicts, their moments of humour and their fatigue.

We're with the Michelin engineers as they make decisions on tyre compounds and with the fitters as they change and balance hundreds of handmade racing tyres. We're with the race organisers, the scrutineers, the marshals and the technicians who maintain the riders' kangaroo leather suits (kangaroo hide is half the weight of cowhide but has 10 times the tensile strength). We're with the truck drivers and riggers, the chefs in the hospitality units, the journalists and photographers in the media centre and we're with the grid girls. Sometimes we're a fly-on-the-wall: in race control, in riders' briefings, in team meetings, in the VIP Village, in the safety car or in the television control room.

Personalities emerge and we get to know them, documenting their lives as they go about their work and travel from race to race.

It's a tough life for some. The technicians typically leave home in February and live as the team until the end of the season, finally going back home in November.

It's a vast exercise in logistics.

We see the 'greatest show on earth' emerge from the trucks on a Thursday morning (or from flight cases after being flown across the world in three Boeing 747 cargo planes), and we see it packed up again on a Sunday evening. The convoy of trucks leaving the paddock after the crowds have gone home is impressive.

Speedville is bustling, full of colour, excitement and glamour.

Unlike the small F1 paddock, which is the spartan and exclusive preserve of 10 teams with 20 drivers, the huge MotoGP paddock is home to 50 teams with 92 riders. All the teams receive an allocation of paddock passes for sponsors and friends so the village streets tend to be very busy on race day.

Celebrity fans and regular visitors to the paddock include Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Keanu Reeves, Ewan McGregor, Vin Diesel, Matt LeBlanc, Michael Jordan and Jay Z.

It's a world of pain.

Motorcycle racers have the reactions of fighter pilots, the fluidity of ballet dancers, the stamina of long distance runners, the balance of tightrope walkers and the precision of surgeons. They need to have courage, yes, but more than that they need to have self-confidence. They enjoy life on the edge, feeding on speed, running on adrenaline and thriving on competition. They also have abnormally high pain thresholds.

Even wearing an armoured suit and crash helmet, falling off a motorcycle hurts.

There are on average more than 700 crashes per season in all sessions of the three classes. That's more than 40 crashes per event. Each rider crashes six times on average per season. Modern safety standards mean fatalities are rare but injuries such as broken bones and muscle trauma are commonplace. It's also commonplace for riders to race with pain-killing injections to overcome injuries that most of us would find agonising just lying in bed, let alone while racing a 260bhp motorbike. They are people who would rather have a collarbone plated to allow them to compete in the next race rather than to allow it to heal naturally. **Speedville enables us to explore this aspect of the sport and the psychology of the young men who risk their lives for sporting glory.**

MARKET AND AUDIENCE

MotoGP has a largely blue-collar audience profile, much more so than Formula 1. It attracts a high proportion of skilled tradesmen (think of the times you've seen a yellow number 46 sticker—Rossi's racing number—on the back of a van). The audience is also younger than that of Formula 1. In the US, it has a similar profile to NASCAR.

The key to *Speedville* is that most of the characters in the show are people like us or people doing jobs we might aspire to do. Even the riders (including British stars Cal Crutchlow, Bradley Smith and Scott Redding in MotoGP, Sam Lowes in Moto2 and Danny Kent and John Mcphee in Moto3) come from working class backgrounds.

Speedville's audience appeal should be similar to that of *Ice Road Truckers* or *Eddie Stobart: Trucks & Trailers* except that this is a more exciting and complicated environment with more stories to tell, perhaps a bit more like *Airline*, which was ITV's most popular factual programme in its day. A commercial channel might attract programme sponsorship from a MotoGP sponsor looking to exploit an existing association with a team or with event sponsorship.

Speedville should create opportunities for international sales as well as for DVD sales.

FORMAT AND PRODUCTION

Each show will be pre-planned to reflect a different aspect of paddock life or to tell a particular story or relate the ongoing stories of one or more of our characters. The events of each race and their impact on our characters or stories will be developed in the editing. The proposal here is to pre-select 9 of the 18 events at which to film or it might be that we edit footage from more than one event into each show.

To give each event a sense of place and context and to convey a feel of what life on the road is like for our characters, *Speedville* should evoke a sense of travel: of arrival, of participation and of departure. Filming will take place over 5 days between the Thursday prior to the event and the Monday of departure from the event. It might include, for instance, a team celebration dinner in Jerez or perhaps the journey of an exhausted crew from the Motegi Circuit near Mito City to Tokyo airport.

Production costs might be minimised by working with a Dorna crew and using Dorna's facilities under our direction at the circuits with editing and post-production in the UK.

Potential narrators for English speaking markets might include current presenters Suzi Perry, Craig Doyle or Gavin Emmett, or former riders Neil Hodgson or James Toseland.

There is potential to adapt the format for other language markets (perhaps under the title **Motoville** in Latin markets like Spain, Italy, France and South America).

Speedville: True Grit

Speedway is the grittiest of sports; even its grit has got grit on it. Ostensibly it involves four fearless young men powersliding around a tight shale oval astride little more than an engine on two wheels with no gears and no brakes in a glorious explosion of noise and violence. Speedway looks great, sounds great and smells great (thanks to the high-octane methanol fuel used to power the bikes), from trackside, but it makes surprisingly **lousy television** thanks to its three-hour-multi-heat format (where each heat lasts about a minute). The racing itself is exciting, but there's a gulf between the audience and the action that traditional sports broadcast formats cannot overcome.

Race highlights might be meat and drink to a relatively small number of diehard fans, but watching basic motorcycles tearing round a stadium oval is never going to be compelling viewing for the mainstream television audience **Speedville** is aimed at.

Even at the elite Speedway Grand Prix (SGP) level, speedway generally appears to be in long-term terminal decline. Falling television audiences and live event attendances are indicators of an anachronistic format that is out of sync with the modern world—the ideal conditions in which to create **great original television**.

Speedville documents the lives of a limited number of key characters throughout the course of the 2017 Grand Prix season, beginning in April and ending in October, with filming taking place at 12 events throughout Eastern Europe and Scandinavia as well as at the flagship events at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff and the Etihad Stadium in Melbourne, Australia. Instead of merely observing these events, we're within them, seeing everything that goes on in the sport from the inside looking out.

The languages spoken in the SGP racing village include English (English, American and Australian), Polish, Danish, Swedish, Finnish, Czech, Slovenian, Russian and Latvian, but the lingua franca here is English. Elsewhere in speedway there are national and league team rivalries but at this level it's a competition akin to gladiatorial combat.

It's outright warfare, both on and off the track!

Hostilities within the sport are not confined to the track. Commercial pressures cause tensions that regularly spill over into skirmishes between the rights holders, promoters, sponsors, the sanctioning body (the FIM or Fédération Internationale de Motorcyclisme) and a specialist media vehemently critical of, and openly hostile towards the sport's management. **Speedville** captures the off-track infighting with unprecedented fly-on-every-wall access thanks to the trust established between Martin Wilding Davies, our showrunner, and Paul Bellamy, CEO of the rights holder, IMG subsidiary Benfield Sports International (BSI), who used to work with Martin.

While the action takes place out on the track, there are arguments going on behind the scenes about cheating, safety, rule changes, hotel bills, parking passes and, more often than not, about money, or the lack of it. The first event of the 2015 season was halted prematurely after the venue had to be switched to a dilapidated stadium due to

financial issues between the organisers and the local promoter, and then the riders refused to race the final heats because of track safety issues.

“Nothing comes close to it, except maybe skydiving. When you’re at the start line just revving your engine up, and you’ve got the other boys on the inside of you and everyone wants to be there first... going down the back-straight and you’ve got somebody inches away from you and your elbows are rubbing and you’ve got to get it into the next corner... it’s just a great feeling.” – British ace Tai Woffinden.

Amongst the participants, there’s an intense rivalry, but there’s also a powerful mutual respect. Speedway is a visceral test of man on man—the rules don’t exclude female riders but there haven’t been any because the sport is so physical—since each man’s bike is essentially the same as his competitors. As we shall see, scrupulous technical preparation, general fettling of machinery and black magic are important to the outcome, but the skill, confidence, bravery and luck of the rider are 90% of the battle.

It’s unpredictable

The short, four-lap format of the heats makes it almost impossible for a rider to recover from a mistake or compensate for a lack of grip out of a corner to win a heat. So it’s unusual for one rider to dominate. Consistency is key. During the 2013 season, the eventual champion, American Greg Hancock, won only one event but was otherwise a consistent points scorer. Polish rider Krzysztof Kasprzak, the runner-up, won three events but was otherwise inconsistent, whilst the rider in third place, the Dane Nicki Pedersen, won no events but scored well throughout the season and won the bronze medal race-off at the final event. There were 9 different winners of the 12 events in 2013. During the last 20 years, only two riders have won the World Championship in two consecutive seasons.

It’s a world of pain

“There’s times where you’ve got to dig deep and that was definitely one of those days—I was crying in between races.” – Tai Woffinden.

Falls are commonplace. Injuries go with the territory. But thanks to trackside air fences and other modern safety innovations, fatalities are rare. Speedway riders need to have a very high pain threshold in order to perform at an elite level while carrying injuries that would have most of us lying still in a darkened room. Tai says he enjoys pain. He is inured to it. In 2013 he chose to have surgery to plate a broken collarbone so he wouldn’t lose championship points to rivals at the next event. He broke the same collarbone again in the penultimate event but rode through the pain to take the title.

PRINCIPLE CHARACTER

Tai Woffinden – British speedway star.

If you didn't know Tai Woffinden was a speedway star, you might imagine he was in a band like the Prodigy. The charismatic 24-year-old former World Champion is inked with spectacular tattoos and sports huge gaping ear gauges. In skinny black jeans and a cap he looks like a skater kid, but put him on a speedway bike and he becomes a tiger.

Scunthorpe born but raised in Perth, Australian, he returned to England with his family to become a professional racer at the age of 16. He qualified for his first tilt at the world championship in 2009 and won it in 2013 to become the youngest world champion of the modern era. Last season he finished fourth.

As well as competing in SGP, Tai rides for Sparta Warsaw in the elite Polish league and for Elit Vetlanda in the Swedish top division. Last season he rode for Wolverhampton Wolves in the British Elite League as well, but now he spends two days a week training to improve his chances of winning another world title. He never takes a day off.

Tai's father and mentor, the former speedway rider Rob Woffinden, died from cancer at the age of 49 in 2010, three years before he would have seen his son win a world title, but Tai's mum, Sue, and his girlfriend, Jan, are now his logistics team and his support system. We'll become part of Tai's racing family during the 2016 season.

Tai's nemesis is the 2014 and 2016 World Champion, 45-year-old American veteran **Greg Hancock** while Danish rider **Nikki Pedersen** is seen as the bad boy of the sport.

MARTIN WILDING

Martin Wilding Davies worked in the MotoGP paddock for 5 years. Arriving at the Spanish Grand Prix in May 1999 as a guest of the struggling Kanemoto Honda team, it was love at first sight. Martin spent time in the team's pit box, learning about the sport from legendary American crew chief George Vukmanovich. He found some sponsorship to keep the team running and spent the rest of the season travelling the world with the team, becoming a fixture in the racing village.

In a report to the Grand Prix Commission (Dorna Sports, the rights holders, IRTA, the teams organisation, and the MSMA, the manufacturers association) he proposed sweeping changes to the sport, including a switch from two-stroke engines, which had been in use since the 1970s but had no commercial application, to four-stroke engines.

Made a director of the Grand Prix Bureau with responsibility for the UK market in which the rival World Superbikes Championship (SBK) was then dominant, he set about turning around the British Grand Prix at Donington Park, which in 1999 sold only 12,000 tickets (SBK at Brands Hatch that year claimed a crowd of 90,000). At the time there were no British riders racing in the elite 500cc GP category.

For the 2000 season, Martin negotiated a live broadcast deal with Channel 5 (SBK was then broadcast on BBC1 whilst Grand Prix had not been seen on UK terrestrial television since the days of Barry Sheene in the early 1980s). He brokered a deal for British rider Jeremy McWilliams to race for the works Aprilia team, supporting the deal with £3 million in sponsorship from Eurobet. On an uncompetitive bike, McWilliams finished 3rd at the Italian Grand Prix and 3rd at the British Grand Prix, the first 500cc race won by Valentino Rossi. Both riders immediately became favourites of the fans.

Martin strove to give the television audience an insight into what fascinated him about the sport. Working with Sunset+Vine and Meridian and with a Dorna crew at the races, he produced behind-the-scenes features and rider interviews to give colour to the live broadcasts, which were presented by Steve Scott.

In 2001, he brokered an eleventh-hour deal for Chris Walker, the most popular up-and-coming British rider, to ride for Shell Honda in Grand Prix rather than for Suzuki in SBK. He also brokered a deal for the 15 year-old Leon Haslam (nowadays a star in SBK) to ride in the 125cc Championship with Italjet. Motorcycle Grand Prix became the highest rating sports show on Channel 5 and ticket sales for the British Grand Prix rose to 50,000, enabling Martin to negotiate a new deal for 2002 in which both SBK and Grand Prix were broadcast live on BBC1, presented by Suzi Perry.

To increase the role of women in an exclusively male sport, he brokered a deal for the German rider Katja Poensgen to ride for Shell Honda in the 250cc championship. Poensgen went on to become the first woman ever to score points in a motorcycle racing World Championship event (and a celebrity nude model for Italian Playboy).

Martin then negotiated a three-year exclusive deal with the BBC (with the switch to four-stroke engines, Motorcycle Grand Prix was rebranded as MotoGP), which began in the 2003 season. Tickets sales for that year's British Grand Prix rose to 96,000. With the absence of UK television coverage, interest in SBK rapidly declined and Dorna subsequently acquired the rights to the rival series.

Martin eventually became responsible for negotiating new Grands Prix at governmental level in China, the Middle East and South America. But he tired of the perpetual travelling—living on aeroplanes and in hotels—and he left the village in 2005 to stay at home and bring up two young children. He has been writing ever since.

The deal with the BBC was renewed in 2006 and again in 2009, by which time the UK audience for each MotoGP broadcast averaged between 1.5 and 2 million.

Prior to working in MotoGP, Martin ran the advertising agency responsible for Sky. He was responsible for the launch campaign for the Premier League on Sky Sports.

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