

The Collective

Imagine rushing down the side of a mountain, at speeds of up to eighty miles an hour. Then imagine this on a bicycle. For those few people who have enough stomach, determination, and talent for the sport of mountain biking, this is the ultimate high. The documentary film, *The Collective*, is an amazing insight to the sport and culture that is mountain biking. This film was created by a fantastic collection of both riders and cinematographers who have come to be known as some of the best in the business throughout the world, hence the title *The Collective*. These mountain bikers have the ability to perform outrageous maneuvers with the talent and grace comparable to that of an artist. In fact, the engineers who design and build mountain biking courses and parks are considered artists and master craftsmen in the mountain biking industry. In this documentary film, *The Collective's* incorporation of magnificent camera work, breathtaking scenery, and an amazing soundtrack truly takes its viewer along for a fantastic ride.

One of the most amazing things about this feature is the intense feeling of being right in on the action thanks to the amazing camera work. The filmmakers' ability to document the flow of a rider on a trail is outstanding. However, the long, complex trails the mountain bikers wind through can create situations which are very difficult to film. A large number of filming techniques were used to overcome those obstacles, including helicopters, cars, cable-cameras, and filming shots in strategic locations along the trail, including the undersides of jumps. The input of the riders themselves was a critical factor. After all, they were the ones who knew exactly what the trails were like and where the best spots were. One very original aspect of the picture is the film itself. The creators used cameras with sixteen millimeter film, giving a very different feel and texture to the piece. This rare film technique allowed the filmmakers to incorporate a variety of filming speeds and types of film based on the subject matter for a particular segment. The mountain bikers did not always appreciate this technique, however, because one of the methods of filming included the use of helmet cameras. This involved a rider wearing a helmet, already weighing around five pounds, with a camera and a sound box duct-taped to either side. Thankfully, they were able to tolerate the extra fifteen pounds and extremely loud camera shutter. The effect of "being the rider" adds an amazing quality to the film.

Not only did the filmmakers capture the effect of "being the rider," but they also captured the full effect of the awe-inspiring scenery beyond those trails. From locations like British Columbia, Canada, to the islands of Hawaii, to the diverse landscape of Utah, the views are spectacular. Aside from the segments showing the mountain bikers on the trails, there are a number of still shots. To describe just a few, there are those of sunsets so bright and colorful, one would think they had been painted in the sky; and those of wild horses running through grassy fields spotted with wildflowers. Another is of a storm which spans the landscape of Moab National Park. The size of the clouds is amazing. The shot shows the calm and soft tops of the clouds with bottoms dark as night, streaked with patches of rain, falling onto the red, rocky land below. Another was taken in Hawaii. The riders are racing down a mountainside covered with lush, green grass as the steamy morning fog swirls behind them as they go. The shots, both in motion and still, are so vivid and detailed any member of *The Collective's* audience could think they were there themselves.

Last but not least, the ability of the filmmakers to incorporate such a variety of music into the picture helps to create the intense feeling that comes with watching it. With musical styles ranging from hip-hop to tribal to the alternative genre, each segment has its own feel, flow, and mood. As the bikers take their runs, each is matched perfectly to the rhythm of the music. As the wheels of the bike hit dips and turns in the trail, the music follows. The smooth sound of a tribal melody can enhance the silky, effortless movements of the rider. The opposite effect can be achieved as well. A jagged, rocky trail can be emphasized by a quick and jumpy hip-hop tune. The soundtrack is also an important aspect of the film because of how mountain bikers utilize music when riding their bikes. Meditation and visualization become important tools when preparing for a new feat. Listening to the beat of a song can energize the rider as well as allowing for focus and relaxation.

As a last thought, the creators of the film note, “*The Collective* represents the collaborative efforts of some of the world’s best mountain bikers. The film is an expression of their words, ideas, and most importantly, their riding.” In essence, the documentary film *The Collective* is an experience any member of the audience, mountain biker or not, will be able to appreciate. Viewers will be entranced by the flow, ability, and grace of the riders through astonishing camera-work, incredible scenery from many different locations, and the diverse soundtrack, each enlaced with each other throughout the film. In a thank you to their viewers, the members of *The Collective* write, “[The film] reflects many hours of work and fun by a large group of people, brought together because of a shared bond – riding bikes.”

Work Cited

The Collective: A 16mm Mountain Bike Film. Dir. Darcy Wittenberg. Prod. Jamie Houssian. Perf. Andrew Shandro, Dave Watson, Thomas Vanderham, Darren Berrecloth, Tyler Klassen, Jordie Lunn, Wade Simmons, Matt Hunter, Steve Romaniuk, Ryan Leech, Geoff Gulevich, Tyler Morland. DVD. The Collective, 2004.

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