



‘Dangerous’ Dan Roberts once again risks life and limb for the sake of a good story. This time he feels the need for speed

The smells: overheated brake fluid, scorched rubber, sweaty bodies. The place: Brands Hatch on a warm late-summer evening. The event: chance for 70 motorcycle-mad folk to race their beloved bikes round Brands Hatch’s hallowed circuit. The thoughts inside intrepid reporter Dangerous Dan’s head: “What the hell am I doing here?”, “This time, I’m really going to die,” and “Why didn’t I choose crazy golf instead?”

I’m here with Robert Boggis of Trackshots,

daredevil cameraman extraordinaire. As if his day job (inspecting hazardous confined spaces) a wasn’t dangerous enough, he spends the summer following speed freaks at speeds of up to 165mph, filming them



with a camera unit strapped to his crash helmet. Fool that I am, I’ve agreed to get on a 600cc souped-up, stripped-down race bike, and try to keep up with pack while Robert films me. After an extended period of prayer, I’m all leathered up, helmeted and booted, heart going like the clappers as we wait for the OK to zoom out of the pit lane and onto the famous



Mmm tasty! cheeky grin can’t disguise Dan Roberts’ nerves

track.

We get the all-clear and the roar of ~~~ three-dozen revving bikes fills the air the as we pull away and hit the circuit. The first two laps are for warming the tyres, so I’m not too far behind the main my group. But once the fast laps start, it’s as if I’m



Crash, bang, wallop. What a picture! Fast action guarantees spectacular shots

On yer bike: Robert Boggis speeds into action



standing still as the other riders fly past me. And I'm not hanging around, getting up to 100mph on the straights into Paddock Hill Bend and Surtees, although taking it easy on the bends, especially Maclaren, which is a virtual hairpin.

Take deep breaths

Occasionally I relax enough to enjoy it (OK, I may have whooped a few times), the sheer power of the bike, the freedom to go as fast as your skill and fearlessness



allow, with no cars, pavements or police to worry about. But mostly it's all about concentration, ignoring the other riders screaming past and focusing on the essentials: holding the right line round corners, braking carefully so the front wheel doesn't lock up and generally not falling off!

Seven laps later we get the chequered flag and roar back into the pits and... it's over, I'm alive and the bike's in one piece. There is a God, after all! Robert checks I'm OK, then zooms off to film the next group. An hour later I'm out of the leathers and asking Robert how he got into this madness. 'I was doing onboard digital filming on my other job, which is doing



'I'm all leathered up helmeted and booted, my heart going like the clappers as we wait for the OK to zoom out of the pit lane and onto the famous track'

inspections of sewers, ships' hulls, etc. If they think an area is unsafe, before the welders go in I have to test it and make sure it's OK. I do a survey of the tank, with my helmet-mounted video. I then had the bright idea of also doing the on-track stuff, with virtually the same equipment.'

That equipment includes a Sony DSR V10P Video Walkman, which Robert stores in a tank bag with an anti-vibration bag underneath it. This is hooked up to a CVX V3P camera unit fixed to his crash helmet with a suction mounting. Robert explains how he chose his gear: 'I started off using a bigger JVC handycam, the DVL9000. That was a bit of a lump, so I went on to the Sony Video Walkman. I've also just bought a Sony TRV20, which I use for the handheld stuff. It's probably taken me two years of playing about to get the right setup.'

Point and shoot

A key part of this setup is the camera unit. At 165mph Robert can't be swivelling his head all over the place to get the right shot, so the direction in which it's pointing is crucial. He elaborates: 'The location of the camera is the most crucial part. When you start to slow it's pointing at the road but when you really get going you're more over the front of the bike. Especially with the fast blokes you've got to have the lens a bit further down. It's all about finding the right balance to keep the rider in the frame.'

Every aspect of Robert's on-track work is about speed. Apart from flying round the

circuit, he has almost no time to adjust between sessions. As with the other types of adventure sports filming I've covered, there's no second chance to capture a shot. To ensure he gets that all-important footage, Robert checks, checks and checks again. 'I haven't got time to mess about, because I've got to change tapes



Action cam: the view from Robert Boggis' helmet-mounted camcorder

in five or 10 seconds, but I have to know it's actually recording before I go. I unzip the tank bank and whack the screen up, then press Record, down, zip, and I'm away. 'I have to see that red light's on, because I've gone out before and done a fantastic session, but got nothing. They're not best pleased when there's nothing on the tape! So I check and double-check all the time.'

So apart from the need to do everything double-quick, and his religious checking of equipment, I wondered what other specific challenges Robert encounters. 'Every group's a challenge. You have three groups, slow, medium and fast, and the main challenge is to stay on, really! Some of the fast boys are super-fast. The ones that say to you "Are you going to be able to keep up?" are going to be trouble. I've been up to 165mph with guys like that.'

Judging by the breakneck speeds Robert clocked when I watched him, he can certainly keep up! But what does he focus on when filming? 'The challenge is keeping them in the frame and making it interesting. I'll put a pass on if I can, let them come past me, just vary it a bit. I want them to get a lot out of it, then they can bore all their friends senseless with the tape!'

Apart from the camera on his bonce, Robert's sidekick, Peter Bowles, also uses the Sony TRV20 to get the riders coming past from the pit area. Robert also used to use a cam mounted to the rear of the bike, but was forced to ditch it. He explains why. 'I don't do rear footage any more because people react differently when there's a camera on them. When they see the cam they try and get as close as they can, and I've been hit up the back a few times.'

Ready for racing. Robert Boggis prepares his bike and camcorder for action



Motorcycle emptiness

And that's not all. Foolishly, before I went out there I asked Robert if he'd filmed any horrific crashes. 'I was on a very fast session when someone tried to pass another guy on the inside and locked up the front wheel. The bike's gone into the tyre wall and he's skidding along the floor. But then the bike's cannoned back across the track and clipped him, broken his collarbone. All this is right smack in front of me. I'm 40 yards behind and the bike's exploded as it hit the wall. I can't get away from this guy skidding across and I ran over him. I thought he might have been dead, he wasn't moving at all, but he just had two broken ribs, broken collarbone, and a gash in his foot. When he eventually phoned me, his first words were: "Did you get that?" That gives you an insight into how these

guys think. They'll suffer a lot of things to get the footage.'

Gulp. Having survived my baptism by bike, I ask Robert what the most important thing is for prospective daredevil bikers. 'Get good insurance!' I wish he'd told me that before... ●

ROBERT'S TOP TIPS

1 – Buy the best you can. Get as much as you can afford, including a good microphone, because sound is so important. Definitely digital, I wouldn't even consider anything else.

2 – Don't be frightened of camcorders or filming. Some of the best cameramen make it seem like a black art, and say: 'It's not for the likes of you, you'll never understand it.' That's rubbish, you will understand it, especially with the quality of manuals these days.

3 – When people are filming, they often put the camcorder down if there's any action. Make yourself use that viewer as your eyes. Atop cameraman once told me, 'If you're falling off a cliff, keep the bloody thing glued to your face!' That's damn good advice.

4 – When you're editing, if you feel like doing a three-second cut, do a two-second cut. Especially with this type of filming, less is definitely more, as it's got to be quick and punchy. 10 or 15 seconds of the same frame won't hold people's attention.

5 – Constantly check everything. Never think 'Oh, that battery'll be OK.' Especially with this game, there is no second chance to get a shot.



Graham Hill bend, any line will do...