

VIDEO

Wave theory

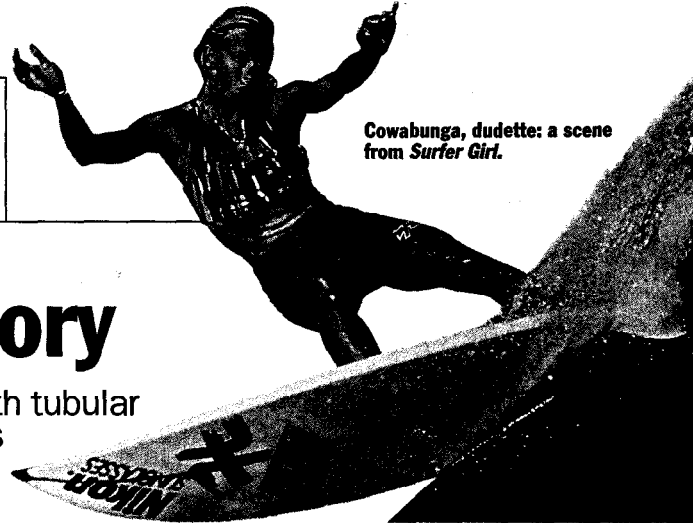
In surfing movies—both tubular and waterlogged—all's swell that ends swell

By Rob Cummings

City-dwelling surfers would be lost without surf videos. Subjected to weeks of wavelessness, we need our vids to maintain stoke that lust for curling water that drives otherwise rational individuals into the cold embrace of the Atlantic. For non-surfers, these videos offer a rare glimpse into the legends and language of an obscure tribe-sort of like a Margaret Mead documentary with a rock & roll soundtrack. When you come right down to it, surf movies are a lot like pornography: They're about action, not plot. Yet Hollywood continues to sully the sublimely mindless, plunging repetition of surfing with narrative and dialogue. It almost never works. Herewith, a survey of surf-themed videos, from the pure to the profane.

Apocalypse Now
Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. 1979. R. 153mins. Marlon Brando, Robert Duvall, Martin Sheen.

Some argue that *Apocalypse Now* was the best surf movie ever made. Duvall's Colonel Kilgore-striding across the beach insisting, "Charlie don't surf!"--is nothing if not stoked. But while the movie does contain some en-



Cowabunga, dudette: a scene from *Surfer Girl*.

lightening dialogue on board design as Kilgore's helicopters race to decimate a village, there's only one shot of people actually riding waves. And napaalming an entire town just to score some surf carries the localism thing too far. If only Coppola had included a shot of the bowlegged Duvall riding that long board of his.

Best line "I love the smell of napalm in the morning."

Wave quality: Mushy, at best.

Big wadnaday
Dir. John Milius. 1978. PG. 120mins. Jan-Michael Vincent, Gary Busey, William Katt.

Milius's elegiac story of three friends growing up and surfing in Southern California is about as close as Hollywood has come to getting it right, but Milius (who cowrote *Apocalypse Now*) drowns in the mythos he's trying to create. Vincent, Busey and Katt struggle gamely with a script that's as wooden in places as the vintage long boards they tote around. Mercifully, the talking stops when they get in the water. Stand-in pro surfers Peter Townend and Ian Cairns rip it up, and Gerry Lopez, the Hawaiian stylemas-

ter, puts in an appearance. *Big wadnaday*, the Great Swell, a swell so big and strong it will wipe away everything that went before it." Yeah, but what do you use to wash away the aftertaste of this dialogue?

Best line: "They've condemned the pier, Jack. You'll be living under the booted foot of the liiguard state."

Wave quality: Clean and glassy to epic.

The Endless Summer
Dir. Bruce Brown. 1966. N/R. 95mins Documentary.

The Endless Summer II
Dir: Brown. 1994. PG. 107mins. Documentary.

When Brown finally finished editing his original globe-circling saga in 1966, he couldn't get a national distributor. So he booked an auditorium in Kansas, advertised the movie himself and packed the house every night for a month. *Endless Summer* went on to become a synonym for the surfer's quest. Nearly 30 years later, Brown corralled two hot young surfers and made another circumnavigation in search of the perfect wave. Nobody can accuse him of messing with the formula: ESI1 hits a lot of the same locales and is plagued

by the same cornball narration, but the amazing scenery and the bonehead enthusiasm make this travelogue work.

Best line "Elvis is alive and surfing in Australia."

Wave quality: Total flatness to bombora outer-reef action.

Point Break

Dir. Kathryn Bigelow 1991. R. 117mins. Patrick Swayze, Keanu Reeves, Gary Busey.

Bigelow's surfing-and-bank-robbery action thriller stars Reeves as an FBI agent forced to hit the waves for an undercover assignment. Some of the stunts in this high-concept, low-probability policier are amazing; unfortunately, surfing is not among them. Swayze's stunt double has a sweet, backside tube ride, but otherwise the boardriding is bogus. Still, this is one of Reeves's least onerous roles, and you can never have too much Busey.

Best line "You don't understand—I'm going to learn to surf or break my neck."

Wave quality: Clean and green, but the big-wave segment is a wipeout.

Surfer Girl

Dir. Donna Olson. 1994.45 mins. Documentary. Available via mail-order: PO. Box 2226, Southampton, NY 11969, \$23postpaid.

This doc is a standout, not only because it explains the motivations of surfers but because those surfers happen to be women. New York filmmaker Olson rounded up five of the best female surfers in the world and brought them to a tiny island in Fiji, where they talk, shred huge, grinding reef break, and talk some more. And the music-by Santana, the Sandals, the Aqua Velvets and the Halibuts--isn't bad either.

Best line: "Everything's like, lifted off of you.. a real relaxing feeling."

Wave quality: Barrel-city; truly epic.

Except where noted, all are available at video stores.