

WILD RACE

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - DAY

Race day at the Daytona 500. A teeming stadium. The racing pack sprints around the oval, bulging like an amoeba. A Sports News TV broadcast plays over the race action.

HARPER (V.O.)
... running of the Daytona 500...
over 30 million fans stateside and
millions more overseas... 2.5 miles
around this world famous track.

Within the pack, whirling tires punish the road. Sleek bodies are streaked with oil and dirt.

Grey smoke spews from the tailpipes of exhausted powerplants. The #1 car is over a half lap ahead of the pack, alone.

TILDEN (V.O.)
If you just joined us, \$1.5 Million
is up for grabs as these rocket
sleds burn through 200 laps at over
170 miles per hour.

The #1 car is peppered with sponsor decals. The garish word "Buddy" is splashed across the hood. The grille shows debris strikes. The air dam is cracked. Beneath the body, shock absorbers and springs shake.

HARPER (V.O.)
Big Bobby Dean in the #1 car is our
leader. He started on the pole and
never lost the lead.

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY

A gloved fist jams the shifter. A black boot stomps the gas. A helmet hides everything but the piercing eyes of BOBBY DEAN (30). They steal a glance at the dash.

A balsa wood racer clamped to the dash sports a photo of a grinning ROBERT "BUDDY" DEAN II (6) clutching the racer.

HARPER (CONT'D)(V.O.)
Dean's car has his son's name
splashed across it. He must feel
pretty happy right now.

Dean's eyes reflect devastating pain.

EXT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - DAY

The #1 car tears along the wall. Spectators are a blur.

HARPER (CONT'D) (V.O.)
Dean boasts thirteen second place finishes. A NASCAR record.

TILDEN (V.O.)
Not the kind you want.

HARPER
The two-time national go-kart champion from tiny Chapel Hill, Tennessee, is glued to the track.

The pack rips by the stands.

HARPER (CONT'D) (V.O.)
Dean's rookie race was just three years ago -- a scorcher -- taking the Number Two and stealing endorsements from a handful of trophy winners.

INT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - PRESS BOX - DAY

BILL HARPER (40), a pompous anchor, gazes at the raceway.

HARPER
After showing incredible promise, Dean has not won a single race. He desperately needs a win.

PAUL TILDEN (50), Harper's snarky sidekick, chuckles.

TILDEN
Hell, his sponsors need a win.

HARPER
Bobby Dean is just 20 laps from taking his first Daytona 500!

Tilden covers his mic and motions Harper to do the same.

TILDEN
Blah, blah, blah. Zero lead changes. No crashes. No warnings. The Nielsen ratings are dropping like a caution flag.

HARPER
I'm falling asleep.

EXT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - DAY

The #69 car fights its way through the pack.

INT. DUKES' STOCK CAR - DAY

RANDY DUKES (25) flexes his fists on the wheel. His mischievous eyes dart from one car to another.

A vicious downshift: boot stomps clutch; stick slams to the stop; opposite boot slams the gas. The tach slips just over the red line and back. He shrieks a REBEL YELL.

EXT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - DAY

The pack starts to gain on the #1 car.

HARPER (V.O.)

Bobby Dean lost a couple seconds on that last lap. The dude's got a problem.

TILDEN (V.O.)

He doesn't think he's a winner.

The #69 car leaves the pack behind.

TILDEN (CONT'D) (V.O.)

(barely above contempt)
Randy Dukes is making his move.

INT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - PRESS BOX - DAY

Isolated in close-up, #1 and #69 look like they're parked.

TILDEN (CONT'D)

Let's flop it to the new girl.

HARPER

What's her name? Sunday?

TILDEN

(condescending)
Sunny.

INT. MOBILE TV NEWS VAN - DAY

TECHNICIANS monitor the race on multiple screens. One blares: "20 Laps Remaining." The rear door BANGS open. The ROAR of the race crashes inside.

SUNNY RICHARDS (25), cheerleader sexy-debate team smart, charges in like a fullback. Her torn pants seam tears more.

SUNNY

Janey, make me a star.

JANEY (25) pauses a playback monitor featuring Sunny.

JANEY

I can't pull it out of my ass.

Sunny rustles Janey's hair and digs safety pins from a desk.

SUNNY

Harper will call any second. I got one shot before the checkered flag.

JANEY

This is all I got.

ON JANEY'S LARGE MONITOR: Sunny looks lost in the teeming pit area. She raises her mic. A SHORT DRIVER waves her away.

SUNNY

Skip that.

Fast forward. She raises her mic to a TALL DRIVER: brush-off.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Skip it.

Fast forward. Sunny's eyes dart from race status monitor to Janey's monitor.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Stop.

ON JANEY'S MONITOR: Dean strides through the pit area like a tank, helmet under arm, hardened game face etched with thousands of sunbaked laps. A hot foot and a temper to match.

The other drivers part before him with glares of fear or loathing. A driver holding a SMALL CHILD stares with pity.

Sunny blocks him, mic in his face, and blurts over the crowd.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

A year of disappointment!

Dean grimaces. He stares past her at something.

DEAN

I'm on the pole for a reason--

SUNNY

You've been there before but--

Dean tries to side step her. She blocks him.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Your car's named "Buddy."

DEAN

My son.

SUNNY

Where is he? Cheering you from the stands?

Dean's face twists in "below the belt" pain.

DEAN

He's not-- Don't expect a victory interview.

He stares past her, again. Sunny's voice betrays a tiny tremble.

SUNNY

Doubt I'll see you in the winner's circle.

DEAN

You even got a press pass?

Sunny juts out her chest, clip-on press pass prominent. Dean snatches the pass, drops it and stomps away.

Sunny growls and bends to retrieve it. Dukes, a handsome, athletic scoundrel, plants himself directly behind her as she straightens-- a pelvic introduction.

DUKES

Careful there, darlin'.

Enraged, Sunny whirls then gets cold. She knows Dukes' type.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Ya'all lookin' for the real deal?

Sunny checks him over. She can't really miss his name.

SUNNY

And you are...?

DUKES

The next winner of this here race.

SUNNY

Really, Mr... Dukes. You're what...
23rd position?

Dukes' smile gets bigger, if thinner.

DUKES

That's for starters, honey.

SUNNY

I'm looking for finishers, honey.
The ones in the Winner's Circle.

Dukes winks and saunters away. Sunny glares. A rough hand yanks her sideways. A laden dumpster snags her pants.

Sunny gasps at the close call and stares up at-- Dean. Their eyes lock. It is A Moment.

Excited YOUNG BOYS mob Dean away. The video freezes on Dean beaming at the sea of smiles, signing autographs. Janey groans and drops her headset on her keyboard.

JANEY

That's it. Nothing.

Sunny bites her lip and pins her seam. Race monitor: 10 Laps.

SUNNY

I'm screwed. New plan. Dean with
stills. Grab him signing the kid's--

The mobile van's door flies open. The ROAR of the race buries Sunny's words. A FRANTIC TECHNICIAN shouts to be heard.

FRANTIC TECHNICIAN

They need your segment! Now!

EXT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - DAY

The #1 car enters the back of the pack.

HARPER (V.O.)

Bobby Dean in the #1 car just
penetrated the back of the pack!
He's going to lap the field!

TILDEN (V.O.)

It's like a wall of steel in front
of Dean! Can he get through?

INT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - PRESS BOX - DAY

Harper and Tilden are on their feet. Suddenly, it's a race.

HARPER

Randy Dukes in the #69 car is only
one second behind!

Tilden smirks at a side monitor of Sunny, poised to speak,
but cut off. She lowers her mic, devastated.

HARPER (CONT'D)

Bobby Dean has just five laps to
show that he's a true champion.

TILDEN

Dean's tough year seems over. But
here comes Randy Dukes!

INT. DUKES' STOCK CAR - DAY

Dukes' windshield is nothing but ass ends and gray smoke.

HARPER (V.O.)

The rookie Dukes is the hardest
charging driver on the circuit, and
better than the cars he drives.
He's fought his way out of the pack
in every race he's run, but has
never captured the checkered flag,
the victim of blown engines--

TILDEN (V.O.)

Or pile-ups.

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY

The engine ROARS. Dean see the tach tease the red line.

HARPER (V.O.)

Two laps to go. Dean's gotta be
wondering: 'can I hold on?'

SERIES OF SCENES - Dean LOSES FIRST PLACE (FLASHBACK)

1. Dean sees the #29 car roar by on the fence. It pulls ahead
on the last straightaway and takes the checkered flag.

ANNOUNCER 1 (V.O.)

... is Dean afraid of the checkered
flag?

2. The #67 car taps Dean's #1. Dean's tires smoke just enough to cost him a few feet. #67 takes the checkered flag.

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)
... and Dean just can't seem to
close out a win...

3. The #49 car drafts then dives inside Dean, their tires nearly touching. Neck-and-neck, Dean loses by inches.

ANNOUNCER 3 (V.O.)
... Dean just doesn't drive like a
champion...

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY (RETURN TO PRESENT)

Dean spies Dukes in his mirror behind the last two cars.

INT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - PRESS BOX - DAY

Harper practically lunges forward.

HARPER
Dukes is incredible! Could this be
the upset that kills a flash in the
pan and births a legend?

INT. DUKES' STOCK CAR - DAY

The wind SHRIEKS. The engine ROARS. Dukes grins as he slips closer to Dean.

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY

Dean sees only the empty track in front of him.

HARPER (V.O.)
Two hundred laps. It all comes down
to this. Dean is one precious
circuit from the checkered flag.

EXT. DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - DAY

#69 leaps through an opening as the pack enters the turn.

HARPER (CONT'D) (V.O.)
He's going for it. In the turn!

TILDEN (V.O.)
(disgusted)
I don't believe it!

#69's menacing grill. Dean behind flapping safety webbing.

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY

Dean's savage eyes reflect the checkered flag. He glances at Buddy in the photo -- and smiles.

CRASH into BLACK!

Spinning images of the track; the colored blur of spectators.
CRASH into the wall! Hood crumples; windshield SHATTERS.

INT. DUKES' STOCK CAR - DAY

Dukes sees reversed spinning images then SLAMS the wall.

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY

The HISS of a hot, dead engine. Smoke drifts inside.

DEAN
Fuck!

INT. DUKES' STOCK CAR - DAY

The crowd's muffled screams and insults; blurred dashboard.

DUKES
Shit, shit, shit, shit...

EXT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY

Dean climbs out into blinding sunlight. The smoking #1 Car is in ruins. Debris trails from the point of collision.

He drops to his knees and bellows. He scans wide-eyed around the empty track. #69 is broken and broadside into the wall.

EXT. DUKES' STOCK CAR - DAY

Dukes staggers away from his smoking car. His ringing ears drown out the crowd. He blinks but can't clear his eyes.

EXT. RACE TRACK - DAY

Dean rips off his helmet and charges Dukes. Even blurry-eyed, Dukes sees him coming.

Dukes heaves his helmet weakly and telegraphs a roundhouse. Dean's helmet shatters Dukes' nose in a bloody spray.

FREEZE MOMENT OF CONTACT IMAGE into:

1. Newspaper sports headline over the image: "Veteran and Rookie - Should They Be Banned from NASCAR?"

2. Big Screen TV in a sports bar shows the image. The crawl reads: "Dean Loses Race - Dukes Loses Face. NASCAR Bad Boys Bad For Sport?"

3. Smartphone text: "Broke his damn nose..."

SIMULTANEOUS and fade out with the above images: ROAR of the crowd; ROAR of the engines.

INT. TOILET STALL - DAY

The DRIP, DRIP, DRIP of a faucet. Dean slumps on a stool in an expensive suit. Sweat beads his forehead.

On a cell, he struggles through his sullen child's silences.

DEAN

Did you see? My car had your name.
That's your car. I race for you,
right? Buddy? You want me to win,
right? Winning is everything.
Buddy? Buddy? No, the crash didn't
hurt me. No, him neither. Who told
you that? She did? Mommy's new...
friend? Put Mommy on. I miss you--

Dean's face hardens. He snarls into his cell.

DEAN (CONT'D)

You told Buddy I killed Dukes? When
can I see-- I got a court order--
You spent everything I won, and
double. You'll get the child
support when you spend it on Buddy--
He needs-- Not a father figure. His
father!

His cell CLICKS her hang-up. He BANGS out of the stall.

INT. NASCAR BOARDROOM - DAY

A NASCAR OFFICIAL (50) stares at Dean in the hot seat. A TV monitor replays the crash.

DEAN
One stinking lap.

It freezes as Dean's helmet smashes Dukes' face, splattering blood. The white helmet is smeared crimson.

The scene runs again, grainy, shot from a distance. Then a dozen more angles: swing, smash, blood.

NASCAR OFFICIAL
You've gone viral. A hundred million views. Guess everyone who watched the race told two friends, who texted two friends-- Now, the NASCAR directors want blood.

Dukes bursts into the room, grinning like a madman, with an enormous bandage on his nose. Dean explodes from his seat.

DEAN
What the f--

Dukes grins at Dean with contempt. He spies his blood-splattered face on the screen and brays.

DUKES
Front row at the horror show. Let the body count begin.

Dean trembles and takes one menacing step towards Dukes.

NASCAR OFFICIAL
Five-year ban.

DUKES
Ha! Kick out the crazies.

NASCAR OFFICIAL
(smirks at Dukes)
You're taking it well.

DUKES
Bullshit! He hit me!

DEAN
You wrecked Buddy's-- my car!

NASCAR OFFICIAL
 To hell with the ratings bump.
 You've caused more pile-ups--
 Crashes kill. You're a damn menace.

Dukes is stone-faced. Dean let's his guard down.

NASCAR OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
 (to Dean)
 Five years.

In a knee jerk reaction, Dean punches the display case,
 SHATTERING the glass. His face is instantly ashen.

DEAN
 Sorry. I didn't--

NASCAR OFFICIAL
 Maybe Richard Petty in his prime
 could've pulled off that gladiator
 act, but at best you're the
 champion "also ran."

The TV'S final frozen image is Dean: bloody helmet raised
 above Dukes like Muhammad Ali's iconic stance above the
 helpless Sonny Liston.

NASCAR OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
 Savor that victory, Champ. It's
 your last.

SUPERIMPOSE: One Year Later

EXT. SANDLOT RACE COURSE - DAY

Tiny GROWLING engines drive dirt bikes and ATVs through a
 gentle course of small jumps, washboard and tight turns.

DEAN (O.S.)
 ...'cause I want my boy back! Where
 am I gonna get that kind of money?

Dean pockets his cell and TOOTS his whistle. The kids all
 motor around him. He pats the mop of a REDHEADED BOY (10).

DEAN (CONT'D)
 Great job. Cut the track perfect.

The redhead beams. A BLONDE GIRL (10) motors up her ATV.

DEAN (CONT'D)
 Did it feel more solid?

The girl nods vigorously, jumps off and gives Dean a hug. He is touched. He shifts his arm. It's in a shoulder cast.

Dean surveys the children, athletic or clumsy-- pure enthusiasm. Dean looks like he wants to hug each of them.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Everybody drink water!

The kids motor to a shaded area populated by PROUD PARENTS.

EXT. SANDLOT RACE COURSE - LATER

Dean sits in the bleachers as TEENAGE BOYS race. Two BUSINESSMEN climb up and hand him a beer.

DEAN
Six weeks and I'll be ready.

BUSINESSMAN 1
Doc told us 12 weeks.

DEAN
I heal fast.

BUSINESSMAN 2
And crash faster.

BUSINESSMAN 1
Bobby, you ain't won one race.

BUSINESSMAN 2
We shipped you to the hospital twice. Don't got that kinda money.

BUSINESSMAN 1
I'm sorry, man. Powerful sorry.

The men descend the bleachers. The first one turns back. He searches Dean's face.

BUSINESSMAN 1 (CONT'D)
Look, I got some extra long-haul work coming up. It ain't fast, but it's driving.

An ancient truck RATTLES by coughing up dust and pulling a graffiti-soiled trailer with a cell ad: "The Future is Now."

Dean's eyes betray fear and loathing. The men drift away.

Dean up-ends the beer then SHATTERS it against a nearby block wall. No one notices him. He slumps on the bleachers.

Below, the redheaded boy rocks back and forth, mute.

DEAN
What'cha got there, kid?

The boy holds a pen and paper. Dean's face twists-- laugh or cry?

DEAN (CONT'D)
Well, come on up.

Dean makes a big show of signing. Then he gets serious.

DEAN (CONT'D)
When I was growin' up, I was in
this little town. It felt like...
(points with his eyes)
...like my whole world was 'bout
the size of that track. And me and
my friends was just goin' 'round in
circles. Couldn't get nowhere.

The redhead nods emphatically.

DEAN (CONT'D)
But I said to myself: "I'm gonna
get out, no matter what." And I
practiced real hard and I never
quit and I made myself good. And I
showed them that I was somebody.
(tousles the boy's hair)
Like you.

The boy turns red. Dean tears off a piece of paper.

DEAN (CONT'D)
I'd be honored if you'd give me
your autograph.

EXT. SANDLOT RACE COURSE - LATER

The boy runs back to the others, who crowd under a banner:
"Outdoor Adventures: Lawrence School for Mute Children." Dean
slips the boy's autograph in his shirt pocket.

INT. DEAN'S HOME - NIGHT

The house is prepped for moving out. Boxes line the walls.
Furniture is stacked in corners. Racing trophies and
memorabilia protrude from boxes.

DEAN (V.O.)
(filtered)
No job-- No assets-- I sold it all!
Can't pay child support if I'm not
racing-- Racing's all I know.

INT. DEAN'S DEN - NIGHT

A big-screen TV casts eerie shadows. A coffee table is littered with beer cans and pizza crust. A cell phone RINGS incessantly.

DEAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(filtered)
To France?! I don't give a shit
where your boyfriend's from. You
can't take Buddy-- The judge--

Buddy's racer is by the redheaded boy's autograph. The cell still RINGS. Dean lies face down on the couch. Is he dead?

Dean groans and gropes the cell, blitzed beyond his capacity to rise from his coffin of a couch.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Yeah? Just resting. Say what?

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Two small scorpions circle with shaking tails. One triumphs. A dirt bike tire smashes the scorpions into protoplasm as it sails off the dune, trailing rocky sand, arcing into the sky--

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACE COMPLEX - DAY

-- above the sprawling Baja 1000 race complex in Ensenada, Baja California. A dozen riders land to the GROWL of big-bore dirt bikes. They scramble downhill as a helicopter swoops in.

The helicopter sports erotic flames and a gaudy "Abrams Industries" logo. It descends toward the race complex, revealing race cars, trucks, and motorcycles.

EXT. HELIPAD - DAY

Dust billows away as Dean hops out, helmet in hand.

EXT. RACE COMPLEX - DAY

Dean wanders by pits with flags from many countries.

It's a menagerie of desert vehicles with big off-road tires. Motorcycles flit through the area like mosquitos. Engines ROAR. Power tools WHIR. Buddies share assorted handshakes.

Race-mania is the mother tongue spoken in a dozen languages. CUTE YOUNG THINGS wander aimlessly, striking poses.

A devil-red crew cab pickup slides to a stop. Erotic flames and "Abrams Industries" adorn it.

A sun-baked head with thinning hair pops from the driver's window. Burly ANDY ABRAMS (55) grins from behind sunglasses.

ABRAMS

The Baja 1000 pistol fires in 48
hours, Hot Shot!

INT. ABRAMS' TRUCK - DAY

Abrams gobbles a cheeseburger as he drives, belly to wheel. Dean eyes his competition as Abrams' truck rolls past pits with trucks, SUVs and bikes.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)

My #99 trophy truck scares the hell
out of me. Like a mad scientist
stuffed an A-bomb under the hood.

DEAN

Two days before the flag drops?
Where'd your regular drivers go--

ABRAMS

They ran slow. Gave 'em a check.
Sent 'em packin'. Now, I got me a
real driver.

DEAN

Well, I 'spect I can beat a bunch
of amateurs... hobbyists.

ABRAMS

(harsh laugh)
It ain't the drivers.

DEAN

The Baja course?

ABRAMS

It ain't the rocks and ruts.

DEAN

What?

ABRAMS

Booby-traps. The crowd lays 'em so they can shoot action shots or watch crashes. Guy's have died. But yeah, the course'll kill ya, too.

Abrams' hamburger drips down his shirt.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)

Hungry bastards.

DEAN

How come?

ABRAMS

Forty years these guys been breaking frames and frying engines for the love of the race, and braggin' rights. This year, Banco Mexicano put up a \$5 Million first prize. It ain't about no trophy no more.

EXT. REESE PIT AREA - DAY

A crew swarms the lime green #1 Trophy Truck. The Trophy Truck is a custom fabricated racing machine, related to a pickup truck as a jet fighter is to a biplane.

The plastic body rides atop an exposed tube frame on huge tires and tall suspension. Aircraft landing lights string above the cab. Spare tires nearly fill the tiny bed.

The baritone ROAR of a monster V8 could shatter a diaphragm. It seems to come from the painted Death Skull on the side.

ABRAMS (O.S.)

You're looking at second place.

INT. ABRAMS' TRUCK - DAY

Dean throws Abrams a quizzical look. Abrams stabs a pudgy finger at him.

ABRAMS

You're winning first place.

EXT. REESE PIT AREA - DAY

JOHN REESE (30) clicks his stopwatch and smiles. STEWIE LESSER (25), a wiry little punk, high-5s Reese.

INT. ABRAMS' TRUCK - DAY

Abrams takes another bite.

ABRAMS

John Reese. Owner/driver. Took the checkered flag the last two years. Almost set a course record. That's over 800 horsepower snarlin' at ya.

DEAN

Damn! More than NASCAR.

ABRAMS

Way more. And mine's got another 100 horsepower sneaked inside.

EXT. BLACKSTONE PIT AREA - DAY

Abrams' pickup rolls past a black trophy truck with #2 in orange and a pouncing lion logo. RONNIE BLACKSTONE (40) watches a crewman lift #2 with a hand jack. His crew cheers.

ABRAMS (O.S.)

Last year, Team Blackstone broke an axle and still came in second.

EXT. RUSH PIT AREA - DAY

The #3 trophy truck gleams in blue, marred by a million sponsor stickers. The crew piles on top for a frat boy photo. A BUSTY GIRL rests her breasts on DANNY RUSH'S (30) head.

ABRAMS (O.S.)

Danny Rush. Some say he's the best.

EXT. PITS AREA - DAY

A CHINESE DRIVER leads his pit crew in calisthenics in front of their bright red #88 trophy truck.

A RUSSIAN DRIVER poses atop his #27 trophy truck.

INT. ABRAM'S TRUCK - DAY

Abrams spits out the window as he eyes the foreigners.

ABRAMS

Tourists. Toss out enough dead
presidents and every guy decides
its lottery time.

EXT. ABRAMS' PIT AREA - DAY

Trophy truck #99 BELCHES raw horsepower from behind its
forward-hinged hood. It rocks with each power surge.

Dean strides up to #99 and covers his ears. JACKIE LEE (25),
50% grin, tosses him ear protection.

LEE

Prepare to be blown away!

A round of "thumbs up" from #99's crew. The hood BANGS down.
Randy Dukes grins from behind the steering wheel.

EXT. PITS AREA - DAY

Dean's boot SLAMS an empty wooden crate into a rusty
dumpster. He stumbles through a blur of spectators.

He turns a corner, plows into a pack of SCRUFFY LOCALS and
freezes. The GANG LEADER motions with his eyes and they
scatter to various beat-up black SUVs and tired motorcycles.

Abrams' truck skids to a stop in front of Dean's boot.

ABRAMS

Where the hell you going?

Dean SLAMS his fist on the hood. Abrams grin is cold.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)

Here's the deal, Ace. I got a
winning truck, guaranteed. You
signed a contract--

DEAN

Why would I drive a thousand miles
across a booby-trapped desert with
the asshole that almost killed me
and my racing career?

ABRAMS

Your quarter-million dollar cut for winning.

DEAN

Keep it.

Dean steps away. Abrams' truck ROARS forward to block.

ABRAMS

You can't get back on the oval. Hell, no one'll let you turn laps. Shithead, I got no time for your goddamn feud! I paid good money to win this race. No snot-nosed punk from 500-miles-of-turning-left is gonna screw that up!

Dean seethes.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)

I'm the only guy with an offer on the table. And believe me, Earnhardt, I'm the last guy that'll ever come looking for you.

EXT. PITS AREA - LATER

Dean trudges through the happy crowd. He stares wistfully at a racing sign that "waves" a huge checkered flag.

A trophy truck's engine ROARS nearby. Dukes hangs his head out of #99, chugging a soda. He grins.

DUKES

Any racin' beats no racin'!

EXT. PRACTICE COURSE - DAY

From #99's underside -- spinning monster tires, drooping suspension and whirling drive shaft -- the trophy truck flies through the air trailing rocks and debris.

DUKES (O.S.)

Yee haw!

#99 SLAMS the ground throwing up plumes of dirt and sand. The suspension heaves three feet.

SERIES OF SCENES - DUKES DRIVES #99 ON PRACTICE COURSE

1. #99 blasts along an impossibly rough road at 120 mph. Dean fidgets like a kid forced to share his ice cream.
2. #99 goes airborne and CRASHES down, nearly tipping. Dukes shakes a triumphant fist. Dean frowns his distrust.
3. #99 slides around a curve, burying the idling #1 Death Skull trophy truck under rocky dirt. Dukes grins an "oops." Dean fights but can't resist a smile.

EXT. PRACTICE COURSE - LATER

#99 dodges through dense scrub brush.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean whips the wheel clumsily back and forth.

DUKES

We're a tank! Smash through it!

Dean straightens up and tears through the foliage.

DUKES (CONT'D)

NASCAR's a game of inches. Bumper-close. Le Mans is a game of feet. Cookie-cutter curves. Memorizing. This here's wild race. Every mile is a new world. The Jurassic Park of racing. Mother Nature waits like a killer. No rules; no mercy!

The world disappears briefly as they plow through loose dirt.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Get your eyes out 200 yards. At 120 miles per hour, that's your reaction time...

EXT. PRACTICE COURSE - LATER

#99 crests an impossibly steep hill. The men climb atop the cab and survey the gorgeous desert sunset.

Dukes drops down and strips his racing togs to piss. Dean shuffles into the brush for the same task.

DEAN

This would make a great winter hideout. My son would tear this up.

DUKES

You should've brought him along.

DEAN

Ex-wife. Custody battle.

DUKES

So, what're you gonna do with your winnings?

DEAN

Buy a new life. Kidnap Buddy.

DUKES

He fighting you?

DEAN

No. The Ex that Swallowed My Bank Account.

DUKES

What's the boy say about it?

DEAN

Not much. Like pullin' teeth to get a word on the cell. Shit. I gave the kid everything. Lives better than a king.

DUKES

"Lifestyle" don't mean nothin' to a kid. Grandma'am used to say: 'Gifts is temporary. Hugs is permanent.'

DEAN

Your Christmases must'a sucked.

DUKES

I'm never having kids.

DEAN

Kids happen. Then you start living--

A rattlesnake fills the air. Dean struggles to zip.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Where is he?

DUKES

Can't see 'im.

DEAN

Oh, shit.

Dean backpedals toward #99, head swiveling. The RATTLE gets closer. Dean can't help himself. He runs back toward #99. And bumbles into the coiled snake.

The rattlesnake strikes. Dukes SMACKS the snake with an entrenching tool. It sails like a home run ball. The two men pant, hands on knees and shudder.

INT. #99 - DAY

They drive in silence through the rugged land.

DEAN

Nice swing. I owe you one.

EXT. ABRAMS' RACING PIT - NIGHT

#99 idles into the pit. Thousands of watts of headlights, fog lamps and hood lamps blink off. For an instant, it's night.

The crew swarms the rig. One tosses Dukes a soda. HANK "MAC" McDONALD (35), a burly, bearded mechanic, shakes Dean's hand and won't let go. Dean stares blankly.

MCDONALD

Bobby Dean! I saw you clean up at Talladega, twice. I never saw a car blow through a pack like you.

Dean hesitates-- is this a joke?

MCDONALD (CONT'D)

Hell! You're the greatest.

Dean's face melts in gratitude.

DEAN

Gotta name?

MCDONALD

Hank McDonald. They call me Mac.

DEAN

Big Mac, it is.

Everyone laughs and digs into #99. Abrams' truck RUMBLES up. Cowboy boots hit the ground; the beer gut arrives next.

DEAN (CONT'D)

So, what position do we start?

The crew nearly falls down laughing. Lee trips backwards over tires and ends up wearing one like a swimmer's inner tube.

ABRAMS

Dead last.

DUKES

Bull shi-- How come?

ABRAMS

You're replacement drivers. Field was set a week ago. Had to scare a couple judges just to get you two loafers on the track.

Abrams tosses each a binder from his truck.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)

Homework. There's more to runnin' Baja than pointin' the hood south.

INT. DEAN'S TRAILER - NIGHT

A pen clatters on a tiny desk. The binder is opened halfway, the page held down by the balsa race.

Dean yawns. The ancient clock says 11:30 pm. He strokes the racer's rough edges like a talisman then walks out.

EXT. RACE COMPLEX - NIGHT

Dean wanders past late night race activities: the SNAP/flash of welders, the CLANK of tools, the CLINK of beer bottles, and the inevitable giggle-gasp of hasty romance.

EXT. "FULL THROTTLE" BAR - NIGHT

A ramshackle building on the edge of the race complex belches salsa music and laughter. Dean pauses, undecided.

The door BANGS open, knocking Dean backwards. Reese, Blackstone, and other drivers tumble out like frat brothers.

LESSER

Hey, it's the professional driver.

ALL

Autograph! Sign my chest! Can I get a ride? Race me!

Dean tries to push through. Reese snarls in his face.

REESE

Think you can just come down here
and show me how to drive?

Blackstone presses Dean from behind.

BLACKSTONE

Desert eats egos for breakfast.

Dean is eye-to-eye with Reese. He shoves his way inside.

REESE

You're a loser on both borders.

INT. "FULL THROTTLE" BAR - NIGHT

Dean drops onto the last stool facing the bar. In the mirror,
he sees a colorful international mix of dancers.

DUKES (O.S.)

Grind it, darlin'!

Dean can't face the dance floor. Dukes dirty dances with a
HOT WOMAN like it was his first language. Spectators cheer.

Dean slips out a pen and scribbles a note on a napkin.

SUNNY (O.S.)

Is it too late for that interview?

Dean freezes. Sunny faces the dancers, leaning on the bar.

DEAN

(over shoulder)

This ain't NASCAR. You following
me?

SUNNY

I follow the story. I'm a
journalist.

DEAN

Journalists never say that.

SUNNY

Following a hunch.

DEAN

A Lance Armstrong hunch? Tiger
Woods? Barry Bonds? Doping race
engines-- there's a twist.

Sunny hides a smile.

DEAN (CONT'D)
 What does Sports News pay for a
 hunch?

SUNNY
 I'm freelancing.

Dean turns to her with surprise and sympathy.

DEAN
 They fired you?
 (off her nod)
 Been there.

SUNNY
 You should have given me that
 interview.

They both laugh a sure-that-was-the-reason laugh.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 Vacationing?

DEAN
 Racing.

SUNNY
 You're suspended.

DEAN
 Not in Mexico.

SUNNY
 What lunatic would-- Sorry.

DEAN
 Andy Abrams.

Sunny eats her surprise. She fumbles for words.

SUNNY
 That's a story. Gambling oil man
 takes on the racing world.

She grabs Dean's pen and reads the printing.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 "Never follow." Nice.

Dukes drags MARIA (25), the ultimate hottie, into the dance.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 Speaking of following, where's
 Winston and Styles?

DEAN

Who?

SUNNY

The guys you replaced. They blew off my interview.

DEAN

Sounds familiar.

Sunny glares despite herself. She pockets Dean's pen.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Too soon?

She shows him a cell photo. Winston and Styles clown on #99.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Abrams said they ran slow, so he gave them a check and fired them.

Sunny processes that. They watch Dukes tear up the floor.

SUNNY

I can't quit until I get the story.
Break a story, break into network.
It's like a checkered flag. You know...

(off his pained look)

Too soon?

DEAN

Your journalist's hunch...?

SUNNY

The \$5 Million prize. Why now?
ABC's Wild World of Sports put Baja on the map in '68, but there's never been a purse even one-tenth this size. The US media doesn't cover it live 'cause it's too long for American attention spans, too spread out unless you're shooting from space, and the crashes are impossible to predict for camera placement. No drama. So, I rented a helicopter--

MARIA'S BOYFRIEND, a real bruiser, looks up from his drink. He balls his fists and pushes into the crowd.

BOYFRIEND

Maria!

DEAN
Someone's gonna get whupped.

SUNNY
Mr. Happy Feet's 50% alcohol. Won't be fair.

DEAN
My partner's got it coming.

SUNNY
Seriously? Dukes?

Dean nods ruefully.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
I'll totally take that interview.

The scruffy locals from around Abrams' pit filter through the crowd behind the boyfriend. The boyfriend slips out a knife as the Gang Leader slips directly behind him.

DEAN
Check that guy behind the boyfriend. He was hanging around Abrams' pit.

SUNNY
Check the boyfriend's knife.

DEAN
Dammit.

Dean looks around. No options; no time.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Dance with me.

SUNNY
Huh?

Dean grabs her waist, whips her onto the dance floor and sashays her directly between Dukes and the boyfriend.

DEAN
Slap me.

SUNNY
What?

He dips Sunny and grabs her ass. Her eyes explode. As he whips her upright, he bumps Dukes out of harm's way.

Dean ducks as Sunny fakes a slap, spins and SLAPS the boyfriend down. The scruffy locals melt into the crowd.

Dukes wobbles a punch at Dean. Dean bear hugs Dukes' legs and hoists him like a Scotsman at a caber toss. Immersed in drunken curses, Dukes SMACKS his head on the exit.

INT. RACE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Drivers file into a briefing room covered in maps, caution lists and racing banners. As Dean enters, a feminine hand slips him a business card.

Sunny rushes from the building. Dean's eyes linger.

INT. RACE HEADQUARTERS BRIEFING AREA - DAY

Balancing a notebook on his knee, Dean reads the back of the business card: "Still looking for that interview. Good luck. Sunny." He slips it in his racing suit pocket.

LEW MATSON (60) stands before a large map and strokes his enormous mustache like an artist. A section near the finish is circled red and indicates a detour around a clump of mountains, with a dozen smaller detours in yellow.

MATSON

No course records this year, boys.

The room erupts in disappointment. Maria helps pass out revised race maps. Dukes winks at her. She smiles.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Tropical Storm "Juan" dropped a load on the slopes, with road wash-outs here and a bridge out here. Dozens of detours. Streams are over flood stage.

DUKES

So, wear your water wings.

MATSON

You can thank Dukes for that great segue to our safety briefing.

GROANS fill the room. An avalanche of debris hits Dukes. A slide of a trophy truck in mid-flight. CHEERS and BRAVADO.

MATSON (CONT'D)

That's the most beautiful shot of the Baja 1000. And the most deadly.

The slide changes to a close-up of a mangled trophy truck.

MATSON (CONT'D)

We sell a lot of t-shirts with the first shot. Not many with this one. Two words: Booby Trap. We race to win, but one law rises above that: you will report course sabotage.

All the drivers nod grimly.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Do not be the driver that beats a booby-trap and decides he's suddenly got a competitive advantage over the guy he just passed. You. Will. Be. Done. Next slide: Spectators on Course...

The slide shows spectators sneaking in front of racers.

INT. ABRAMS' RACING PIT - DAY

Sunny sneaks into Abrams' pit. Team Abrams eats lunch while sprawled on tires.

The LOUD IDLING of a black SUV covers Sunny's movements. She stifles a gasp. Abrams fumes to the SUV driver-- the Gang Leader. She takes a cell photo as the Gang Leader points along a map with his pistol.

Sunny frisks Abrams' beaten desk. In a false bottom side drawer, she takes cell photos of cash, a seriously-overdrawn checkbook and crumpled \$50,000 checks for Winston and Styles.

She rushes away then freezes at the door. The Gang Leader casually waves his pistol at Abrams, who back peddles toward her. Sunny is trapped.

Abrams stomps around the corner and spies Sunny's lovely tush hanging from #99's cab. Team Abrams admires her ass.

ABRAMS

Visiting hours are over, young--

Sunny's beauty catches Abrams' breath. She points the camcorder at herself with #99 in the background.

SUNNY

I'm here with Andy Abrams, Trophy Truck Number 99, webcasting from the Baja 1000 desert race.

She points the camcorder at the shocked Abrams.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

You're the new kid on the block.

Team Abrams snickers behind him.

ABRAMS

At this race, sure. Sponsored a winning dirt bike in El Paso.

SUNNY

Still, this is the off-road Major Leagues. That's a big gamble.

ABRAMS

I been punching holes in the ground chasing black gold for nearly 20 years. That's a big gamble. But I got a lot more horses in this race.

SUNNY

I hear you like the ponies.

His smile gets deathly tight. He pushes the camcorder down.

ABRAMS

Now, if the boys behind me will haul their tails back to work, we might just win this hard drive.

Team Abrams scrambles back to #99. Sunny clicks off her camcorder and sashays away. Abrams watches with suspicion.

EXT. RACE OFFICIALS AREA - DAY

Controlled chaos. With her camcorder, Sunny interviews Matson, utterly calm in the eye of the pending storm.

SUNNY

Did you ever think you'd award five million dollars?

MATSON

It's about the race, not the reward.

Maria thrusts Matson a note. He strokes his mustache and nods a decision.

SUNNY

Did Banco Mexicano call you or did you call them?

Matson eyes her with suspicion.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

I mean, why racing? Why now?

Three EAGER ASSISTANTS in short skirts drag him away.

MATSON

You'd have to ask them.

EXT. PRACTICE COURSE - DAY

The low sun casts long shadows. In the distance, #99 is a dart at the end of a dirty, expanding pointer of dust.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean is 100% concentration as he drives the course. Dukes grins like a madman.

DUKES

Faster. Must go faster.

In an instant, the desert disappears. Lacking a windshield, the cab drowns in debris. They slam forward, snagged by their harnesses, their groans stifled.

EXT. PRACTICE COURSE - DIGITAL FOOTAGE - DAY

#99 SLAMS into an obstacle. Scrap lumber hurtles away. Dirt explodes up like a 250-pound bomb.

Rapid-shot captures #99 exiting the dust cloud, arcing high into the air, with the front suspension partially torn away.

EXT. PRACTICE COURSE - DAY

Dust, road debris and shredded tires follow in #99's aerial wake. The suspension hangs like landing gear.

#99 CRASHES to Earth, bounces and heels over, spraying dirt like a water skier. It stops deathly still on its side.

INT. #99 - DAY

The world is blurry and sideways. The men groan.

SPECTATOR 1 (O.S.)
(distant)
Awesome!

SPECTATOR 2 (O.S.)
(distant)
Oh, shit!

A car door SLAMS. A car ROARS away. #99 GROANS and HISSES.

DUKES
What... the... hell...

DEAN
Well... This feels familiar.

EXT. ENSENADA AIRPORT - DAY

In the golden sunset, a dilapidated helicopter squats on the tarmac, bubble canopy cracked, exotic bird guarding the sagging twin blades. Sunny shudders like it's a dead body.

She checks her wallet. It's empty. She reluctantly offers a credit card to the ANCIENT PILOT like she expects him to demand cash. He pulls out a cracked smart phone with a point of sale attachment and swipes her card.

EXT. ABRAMS' RACING PIT - NIGHT

Glaring headlights. Truck brakes SQUEAL. Air brakes HISS. Team Abrams stands frozen in the headlights, stunned. #99 lies strapped to a large tow truck's lift bed.

Crew members creep toward #99 like it might explode. They shine flashlights on the stricken undercarriage.

Dean and Dukes ease down from the tow truck's cab. Silent, banged-up and ashen, they stand back from the men. Crew members exchange fearful glances.

LEE
It don't look too bad.

McDonald SMACKS the back of Lee's head.

Abrams' truck races up, high-beams cutting shadows. The crew reflexively line up like prisoners, shielding their eyes. Dean and Dukes duck behind them.

Abrams explodes from the truck, SLAMMING the door. He lumbers to #99 and stands there shaking.

ABRAMS
Jesus Christ!

Abrams grabs the tow truck's bed and shakes it. #99 SQUEAKS.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)
Crank!

CLANCY "CRANK" EDWARDS (60) trudges up to Abrams.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)
You got five hours.

LEE
(whispers)
We could use a miracle.

McDonald SMACKS Lee in the back of the head. The men swarm to #99, revealing Dean and Dukes.

ABRAMS
You!

The two men wilt. The lift bed's hydraulics WHINE.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)
I could have you killed.

#99 SCRAPES horribly as it slides down the metal bed.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)
Get the hell out of here.

Dean and Dukes limp away, groaning.

EXT. ABRAMS' RACING PIT - LATER

#99 sits stranded on tall jacks, minus tires. Sparks fly as a welder SNAPS and POPS. McDonald lifts his welder's hood.

Crank shines a light on the weld. Lee TAPS it with a hammer. Crank snatches the hammer and gives the weld a solid BANG. Abrams marches up. Crank and the crew assemble.

ABRAMS
Gimme one word.

CRANK
Go.

Crew members cheer.

INT. SUNNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

In a very cheap room, Sunny huddles over a tiny table. Story notes and newspaper clippings surround a tablet diagram.

"Abrams - fish out of water" fills the center circle. Spokes lead to smaller circles: motorcycle racing failure, \$250,000 gambling debt, oil drilling "dry hole," and Baja 1000. Tiny spokes off "Baja 1000": \$5M purse, no experience, new team.

She adds a new circle to the "team" spoke: Old Drivers, with a question mark and "paychecks not delivered." She adds spokes for Dean and Dukes as New Drivers. She grimaces.

SUNNY

Great. Dean and Dukes. What the hell is really going on?

INT. DEAN'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Dean studies through fatigue and despair. Faint grinder and hammer sounds filter through the trailer's tiny windows.

He stares at his scarred helmet and hears the memories of ROARING engines, ROARING crowds and... his horrific CRASH.

He pours whiskey and raises it to his lips. He spies a photo of Buddy on Dean's shoulders atop Dean's race car.

His eyes well up. He dumps the drink in the sink and kicks furniture to clear the tiny floor. He lays out the map and traces the route with the balsa racer.

The course starts at Ensenada then travels south through a dozen towns, crossing many streams and dry beds, twisting through mountains and climbing over passes, jogging dramatically around wash-out zones, and finishes at La Paz.

Faint sex cries filter through the trailer's windows. Dean grits his teeth and continues "driving" the map.

INT. DUKES' TRAILER - NIGHT

Maria rides above Dukes to the SQUEAKS of a tired bed. Their eyes are locked on each other; naked bodies sweat.

She mutters in passionate Spanish as Dukes' groans intensify. His eyes stray to his little desk, cluttered with racing docs and the course map. He's surprised; he's losing the moment.

DUKES

Ma'am... um... senior-ita...

He gently tries to stop her. Her eyes pop open. In desperation, she rides him harder, clamping down on his shoulders. Her voice climbs an octave-- maybe she's close.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Ma'am... um... To hell with it.

Dukes slides out of bed, Maria still riding him hard, and carries her to the desk. Dukes searches the papers, holding her with one arm and keeping time with her rhythm.

He finds a note and slides it along the map to the detour. He grins in satisfaction. Maria SCREAMS her orgasm.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACE COMPLEX - DAY

The massive crowd SCREAMS in a dozen languages. Racing vehicles are in a gas-fueled shouting match: engines at full throttle, tires inching forward, exhausts spewing gray air.

The initial race course cuts through Ensenada, beginning with the starting line and its fenced city street chute. A multicolored ribbon of racing metal retreats a quarter mile behind the starting line banner.

#99 fidgets, dead last. "Buddy" is scrawled across the hood.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean pops his head out the passenger side, scanning the seemingly infinite line of racing machines in front.

DEAN

Team Reese will hit La Paz before
we trip the starting line.

DUKES

Don't matter.
(off Dean's look)
It's friggin' race day!

EXT. BAJA 1000 PRESS AREA - DAY

A camcorder's view finder sweeps the starting line then slowly zooms. Sunny steps into the camcorder's view finder.

SUNNY

Sunny Richards, live, webcasting at
the famous Baja 1000 desert race.

(MORE)

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Behind me, dozens of cars, trucks, bikes, Baja Bugs and brazen lunatics are within moments of braving over 1,000 miles of cactus and rocks, cliffs and ravines, sand washes and dry lake beds, cattle crossing and mountain passes to race along Mexico's Federal Highway 1 from beautiful Ensenada on Baja's exquisite Pacific coastline, to La Paz on the Sea of Cortez...

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes fiddles with the controls.

DUKES

How do you set the trip odometer?

DEAN

It's not the miles. It's the checkered flag.

Dukes sets the trip odometer to 0000. Abrams' scowling face pops into the cab. The men jump.

ABRAMS

Listen up! Don't stop. Ever. If you hit a dog, don't stop. If you hit a cow, don't stop. If a driver buys the farm in front of you, step on the gas.

Dukes laughs. Abrams shakes like he's going to throttle him.

ABRAMS (CONT'D)

They'll trick you. They'll try to break you. People will jump in the way or fall in the way or just stand there takin' pictures.

Dukes does a "rah, rah" move.

DUKES

Don't stop. Don't stop. Don't stop.

CRACK! The starting gun fires. Engines ROAR. Lee and McDonald drag Abrams away.

ABRAMS

(fading)

You hit someone, don't stop!

EXT. BAJA 1000 STARTING LINE - DAY

The #1 Death Skull truck BLASTS off the line. The massive, SCREAMING crowd is on its feet, a blur of colors. Helicopters circle with cameramen hanging from their doors.

INT. #99

Dean sets his stopwatch and scribbles a note. No movement.

DEAN

We should have sat in the stands,
caught the start then taken a cab
back here.

DUKES

Wh-iners never wh-in.

The Baja Buggy in front of them jerks forward. Dukes gives it half power and nearly squishes the Bug.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Yeee Haaa-- oops, shit!

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 finally rolls under the starting banner, but can't pass. The narrow chute stretches into the distance, hemming in #99 like a roofless tunnel.

The massive crowd leans over both sides of the flimsy fencing, waving and shooting photos, making the road seem even more narrow.

Once out of the chute, the "safety" fences end. #99 blasts under several claustrophobic concrete overpasses as the colorful crowd waves and takes photos.

Suddenly, #99 jumps into an Italian rush hour. A dozen slower racers try to pass each other simultaneously.

DEAN (O.S.)

Be smooth, Dude. We got a thousand
miles to catch Reese and
Blackstone.

The road leaves modern Ensenada, enters the barrios and turns to dirt. Buildings are ramshackle; homes are primitive.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Below, the racers look like angry bugs.

SUNNY

Those scurrying bugs below are part of a more than half-century old desert racing tradition. The Baja 1000 is the best known, the Grand Daddy, the Superbowl. Vehicles of every type, from production cars to purpose-built monsters, have torn across this sunbaked ground.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 blows by a SPUTTERING Baja Bug.

It slips around two dueling motorcycles, their engines BUZZING like angry bees.

It blasts through three dune buggies, scattering them.

Clumps of spectators line the tattered road, dangerously close, or rush back and forth across the course.

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

Twenty long dust trails on the open desert, like war planes en route to a bombing, point south. The #1 Death Skull truck is ahead of the #2 Lion truck, with the others staggered in small bunches back to the horizon.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny scowls confusion at her investigation notes. She tilts her camcorder on its mount as she reports.

SUNNY

Sunny Richards reporting live above the leaders at the Baja 1000 desert race. At this point, competitors trail north behind me for 30 miles. From 500 feet up, the surface looks smooth as glass, but I've driven that hard ground. I can tell you that I wouldn't even want to walk over it, let alone slam through the brush and the rocks at over 120 miles an hour. These tough drivers need hard asses.

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

A pig runs across the road. #99 cuts behind it, kicking up dust. The pig reverses itself. The pickup in the dust cloud behind #99 doesn't see it-- suddenly bacon.

SERIES OF SCENES - RACING EXCITEMENT

1. A trophy truck flies over a single bump.
2. A dune buggy SPLASHES through an open sewer.
3. A motorcycle tears through a sand dune.

EXT. OJOS NEGROS - DAY

#99 sprints through the town of Ojos Negros. Children play in the street. Chickens, pigs, and dogs run wild.

A RACING MOTORCYCLIST relieves himself against a shack. He spies a dog peeing on his bike.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes laughs and points at the motorcyclist.

EXT. OJOS NEGROS - DAY

As the racer tries unsuccessfully to shoo the dog away, he pees on himself. A tanker truck lumbers across an intersection, more a mud hole than a cross-street.

DEAN (O.S.)

Watch it!

DUKES (O.S.)

Watch this!

When it's nearly on top of the tanker, #99's wheels lock up. It slides behind the tanker and in front of a dilapidated flatbed pickup with a tall load of straw bales.

The pickup swerves. The straw bales sway mightily. #99's engine ROARS back to full power as two racing SUVs, #83 and #92, skid to a stop for the traffic.

INT. #99 - DAY

Eyes locked on the road, Dukes reaches out for a fist bump.

DUKES

Woo hoo!

Dean holds back. Dukes gives him a "really" look. Dean grins just a bit and bumps Dukes' fist.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The course widens. Line abreast, four motorcycles sway in the uneven track, kicking up a curtain of dust, fighting to lead.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes stares through the choking dust.

DUKES

They're s'pose to give way!

DEAN

And eat the leader's dust the next
10 miles?

DUKES

Hell, I can fix that.

#99 nearly hits two bikes as it squeezes between them.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Bobby, give 'em a salute.

Dukes and Dean flip them off.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

As #99 ROARS by, one of the riders flips them off. He crashes in the soft dirt and slides for a mile.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes takes a long, sloppy swig of soda and hollers. Dean chuckles and eyes Dukes with professional respect.

SERIES OF SCENES - THE RACE GETS TOUGHER

1. The beefy #66 dune buggy flies over a hump and lands first on one tire. Crazy bounces; it nearly topples.

2. The #17 trophy truck dives down into soft dirt. It washes over the truck like a surfer's wave.

3. An SUV sprays gravel everywhere as it twists around a tight turn, losing momentum. A scrappy dirt bike passes it.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The #1 Death Skull truck sails over a short rise and lands perfectly, kicking up dust.

INT. #1 DEATH SKULL TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

The speedometer is 130. The first pit stop marker flashes by. Reese smiles. Lesser scribbles clipboard notes. Thumbs up.

SUPERIMPOSE:

Map of Baja California. A drawn course line snakes south from Ensenada 1/4 the distance to La Paz. The odometer rolls 0277.

EXT. PIT STOP #1 - DAY

#99 weaves and jerks into Abrams' pit. A deluge of gas pours into its tank, slopping excess onto the ground and the body.

Dean and Dukes bail out. Dean vaults into the driver seat. Cramping, Dukes hops towards the porta-potty.

Power tools GRIND as powerful hands tear the tires from the suspension and toss them aside. Fresh tires roll into place scarcely a hair's breath behind the discards.

DEAN

I counted 20 behind us!

CREWMAN

We count it as 30!

DUKES (O.S.)

(muffled from outhouse)

Aaaaaah!

DEAN

Come on!

DUKES (O.S.)

Aaaaaah!

Dean bounces in his seat. The crew glares at the outhouse.

DEAN

Pinch it off!

DUKES (O.S.)

I can't.

The pit shakes from the engine's ROAR. #99 starts rolling.

Dukes explodes from the outhouse and dives into the passenger side. His legs flail as he struggles inside. #99 scatters loose dirt as it ROARS away. Dukes waves.

SERIES OF SCENES - THE RACE GETS DANGEROUS

1. A dune buggy races through spectators crowded less than 10 feet on both sides. Their home-made signs flash by.

2. A motorcycle digs into deep sand to the front hub. The rider pitches head-first into the sand.

3. An SUV sails majestically through the air, and CRASHES off course. The road jogged at the bottom of the rise.

INT. #27 RUSSIAN TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

Two RUSSIAN DRIVERS grin at each other as they blast along.

RUSSIAN DRIVER

(Russian, with subtitles)

I gotta get one of these for the
Ural Mountains!

INT. #16 GERMAN TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

Two GERMAN DRIVERS grin at each other as they blast along.

GERMAN DRIVER

(German, with subtitles)

I gotta get one of these for the
Alps!

INT. #88 CHINESE TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

Two CHINESE DRIVERS grin at each other as they blast along.

CHINESE DRIVER

(Mandarin, with subtitles)

I gotta get one of these for the
Altai Mountains!

INT. # 127 RANGE ROVER - DAY

A BRITISH RELIEF DRIVER glances at his utterly calm partner.

BRITISH RELIEF DRIVER
Care for a spot of tea between
jumps?

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 trails the #88 trophy truck like flying into a jet's contrail. It fights its way forward to within a car-length.

Ahead, the road narrows. #99 pulls up danger-close as #88 weaves to prevent passing.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes leans forward impatiently.

DUKES
What're you waiting for!

Dean squints as #88 weaves. The #88 truck becomes--

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - DAY (FLASHBACK)

-- a sea of stock cars. Nothing but weaving ass ends. Dean chokes the wheel.

He roars up on their bumpers, lurching toward a momentary opening. Two cars slide in the way. Dean swerves.

EXT. INDIANAPOLIS INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY - DAY

Dean's #1 car skids down the straightaway, trailing black tire smoke. The #15 car burns past low on the inside, taking the checkered flag.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY (RETURN TO PRESENT)

#99 edges along side of #88. The pinch zone looms. Halfway to passing, #99 hits the road's rough edge.

#99 spins out as #88 drills through the narrows.

INT. #99 - DAY

The rocky desert is a spinning blur. The cab fills with dust. Dean fights the wheel and shouts. The spinning stops.

Dean wheezes and shakes. Momentary silence. Dukes glares.

DUKES

Dude! Get after him!

Dean jams his foot on the gas.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 chases #88 through a tightly winding road.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER

Sunny motions the pilot lower and zooms her camcorder to see Dean driving. She zooms back as #99 hits a small jump.

SUNNY

Two monster trucks battle along
little more than a rocky trail.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The helicopter swoops down. #99 pulls close to #88.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny glances at the drivers' checks cell photo she took at Abrams' desk-- they're stained with blood. She gasps and glances up. The course beyond the racers disappears at a choke point.

SUNNY

Oh, my god!

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 catches #88. Their front tires are line abreast and spew dust like water from a fire hose. Neither slows down.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny pivots the camcorder and frames the racers.

SUNNY
(despite herself)
They're going too fast! They're
going to crash! Look out!

The camcorder captures the trophy trucks nearly smashing into each other at the choke point. They disappear.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99's nose dives before heaving over the drop. #88 sails out in front, arcing off the trail. #99's tires and shocks absorb the rough gully and race away.

The #88 truck bounces in the brush and nearly tips over then jerks back onto the road. It fades into #99's dust.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny holds her breath. The two trucks emerge in the gully and race away, #99 lengthening its lead.

SUNNY
And that's how it's done. This is
Sunny Richards, heart still in my
throat, reporting live from the
Baja 1000.

She plops back in her seat, stunned.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
Dean, you're one crazy dancer.

EXT. FARM - DAY

Scrawny cows mosey across the road near a dilapidated barn. A cowbell DINGS as one cow stops to MUNCH on a pathetic grass clump. A SCRAGGLY FARMER SLAPS it with a switch.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean peers at the skirmish line of cows.

DEAN
Oh, shit!

Dukes jams his hands on the dash. Dean jerks #99 around.

EXT. FARM - DAY

#99 slides almost sideways through the cows, spooking them.

DUKES (O.S.)

Woo hoo!

INT. #99 - DAY

The men practically bounce in their seats as they laugh. Dean beams. They high-5.

DUKES

Awesome! You're some kinda driver!
That reminds me of the first time I
ever brake-slid my Schwinn.

DEAN

I get that. My first brake-slide
was a little banana-seat BMX. Gave
me a knee scar. And a beating
from...

(chokes the steering
wheel)

... my old man.

DUKES

Didn't make it, huh?

DEAN

I've done better since. Not that it
made a lick of difference to him.

Dean catches Dukes' questioning look. He grits his teeth as he remembers.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Heroes don't hit the helpless.

EXT. FARM - DAY

The cowbell DINGS slow as the cow runs down. Across the road, two SCRAGGLY BOYS drive the cows back to the farmer.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes catches the cows headed back to the farmer.

DUKES

Was that a booby trap?

DEAN

I was expecting someone to throw a stick in our spokes.

Dukes chuckles.

DEAN (CONT'D)

I'd like to booby trap all the roads to France.

Dukes looks confused.

DUKES

I miss a turn?

DEAN

Naw. Just wanna block my ex from taking Buddy cross the big pond.

DUKES

Damn.

DEAN

Shouldn't you call something in?

Dukes fumbles the radio. He stumbles over the wording then glances at Dean.

DUKES

It was late.

DEAN

And you were busy.

Dukes shrugs his guilt. His eyes question Dean.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Not a clue. Studied the course instead.

Laughter. Dukes takes three tries to hang up the mic.

DUKES

I'll just use my cell.

Dukes unzips his racing suit and pulls it out.

DUKES (CONT'D)

No bars.

Dean's hand sweeps the empty vista.

DEAN

Ya think?

SERIES OF SCENES - INJURY CRASH AND HEAVY DAMAGE

1. Through the front windscreen, the road is a tunnel, the horizon pinched. The vehicle hits a jump, the sky fills the view, then the road seems to rise up and strike the vehicle.

The horizon spins as the vehicle rolls off the roadway. Dust fills the compartment. The driver's head falls to one side.

2. A dune buggy's rear wheel shears off at the spider gear. It bounces into the desert like it found a short cut.

3. A Baja Bug slides into a berm, catches a tire, flips and rolls into a telephone pole.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean weaves around brush, slowing progress.

DUKES

Stop dancing. You're killing speed.
This ain't your rumba with the news
hottie.

DEAN

Um, Sunny?

DUKES

Oh, got her name. Got her number?

Dean is flustered.

DUKES (CONT'D)

You do!

Dean floors the accelerator.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 veers off the road, straight through the weeds.

DUKES (O.S.)

What are you... a virgin?

EXT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

The copter swoops among the hills. Scrub forest trails extend from the race course like veins on a leaf.

Spectators crowd both sides of a huge jump. Sunny's helicopter lands at a sagebrush clearing. She runs over.

EXT. JUMP - DAY

A motorcycle sticks a landing, kicking dirt on spectators. The #44 trophy truck jumps. The crowd SCREAMS in delight. It SLAMS down within feet of the camera-crazed spectators.

Sunny takes the measure of the jump then strides onto the open track as she broadcasts with the jump directly behind.

SUNNY

The roar of the spectators nearly drowns out the racers at this improvised jump, somewhere in a scrub patch of the Baja 1000--

#99 explodes through the jump. A woman screams. #99 arcs above Sunny. She dives to the ground. #99 SLAMS back onto the course. Sunny catches a dirt's-eye view of #99 racing away.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Sure, Dean. Grab my ass then...

She chuckles, finger phone to her ear.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Call me.

The #12 trophy truck CRUNCHES down. Its mirror strikes a woman. The crowd SHRIEKS. Bystanders rush to her aid. A motorcycle barely missing them as they circle the body.

Bystanders push the crowd back, screaming in Spanish. Sunny struggles to compose herself before the camcorder.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Tragedy at the Baja 1000. Behind me, a spectator was just struck--

The #12 trophy truck races back. The two drivers jump from the vehicle, devastated. The ANGUISHED DRIVER collapses.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 CRUNCHES into a rock field. Large chunks BLAST the undercarriage. A jagged rock SLAMS the hasty suspension weld.

INT. #99 - DAY

The men grunt as if they'd personally taken the hit. They grimace at each other.

DUKES

Damn!

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

Black smoke rises in the distance. #99 blasts past #77, a 4X4 truck, hood up, engine flaming. Two drivers pitch shovels of rocky dirt on the motor. Most of it just spills onto the ground beneath the burning engine.

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

#99 goes airborne. It lands in deep sand, swerves to hard-pack. A dune buggy lies on its back. The two drivers try to rock their vehicle upright. They slip and fall.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny aims her camcorder at a trophy truck in pursuit.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The Chinese #88 trophy truck tears around a corner, spraying gravel, but slipping off the barely-a-road. Just ahead, the #16 German trophy truck bounces awkwardly.

#88 cuts the angle and jumps a mogul to land directly in front of #16. #88 ROARS ahead to faint shouts of triumphant.

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

#99 tears across the empty desert, alone in the vastness.

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

A race course directional arrow sits on a pole. Clumsy hands struggle to loosen it. Another pair joins in as they argue in Spanish. The hands slap at each other. The sign falls off.

Clumsy hands point the arrow off course, down a gravel road. A hammer bends two nails and bloodies the helper's thumb before the sign achieves the new direction.

Two ROUGH MEN scurry to a beat-up gray SUV. One beats on the other.

The #1 Death Skull truck ROARS toward the sign then heaves onto the detour. Spanish catcalls and laughter follow it.

SERIES OF SCENES - DEAN CREAMS THE COMPETITION

1. #99 passes the #43 trophy truck as they crest a ditch.
2. #99 passes the #57 trophy truck around a sandy bend.
3. #99 passes #53, a Toyota Land Cruiser, climbing a rise.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The gravel road splits then splits again. The mountains loom.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes pops a soda and smiles at the scenery like a tourist. His eyes catch the distant course arrow then snap to the map.

DUKES
Uh, go... right!

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 swerves right, fishtailing and spraying loose rocks.

INT. #99 - LATER

The mountains fill their view. Dukes BURPS and grabs a soda.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

A distant dust cloud appears in the distance. The cloud becomes the #1 Death Skull truck. It's 240 mph closure!

The two trophy trucks swerve onto their respective shoulders--barely five feet between them.

	GUNN (O.S.)	DUKES (O.S.)
Reese!		Reese!

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean is shell shocked. Soda drips from Dukes' face.

DEAN
Watch for signs. Lying signs.

DUKES
Yeah. That's how they got Reese.

DEAN

And dust clouds. In front and behind. Don't want another fly-by.

Dukes nods his head and wipes at his face.

DUKES

Reese got screwed by the old switcheroo. Chasin' his tail.

Dean just growls.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 tears along, shooting twin dust clouds from its tires.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes uncharacteristically weighs his words.

DUKES

That was an awesome... move. Was you Pappy ever proud of you?

DEAN

Scars of pride down my back.

DUKES

My Pappy's specialty. Greatest hooch driver in the Ozarks, but a mean mother when he got lit.

DEAN

He watch you race?

DUKES

Sure, he was around a lot, moon shinin' being mostly part-time. Plenty of time for beatin's, but at least he was around. The Law caught up with him while I was still peddlin'. Cain't outrun a 357. Your Pappy?

DEAN

I begged for my first go-cart. He wouldn't let me touch it. Treated it like his own. I 'spect he thought he could fight the judges into letting him race it against the other kids.

(MORE)

DEAN (CONT'D)

I remember winning that first race and getting all that attention. He didn't smile once. When my Mom gave me a big hug, that was it. He didn't leave a forwarding address.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The road just dies. #99 skids sideways into a snag.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean SLAMS the dash, violently shaking it.

DEAN

Sorry.

(off Dukes' look)

My old man said: 'always throw the first punch. May be your only shot.'

(beat)

They got Reese, too. Maybe all the leaders. Get your head out of your ass and-- Just check the map. Find the course.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 spins around and blasts back the way they came.

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

#99 plows around a turn, spraying rocks.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes fights the map. He gasps.

DUKES

Stop, stop, stop!

DEAN

Shit!

Dean slams the brake. They pitch forward.

DEAN (CONT'D)

What? The course ain't coming to us.

Dukes points out a new course.

DUKES
Forget that shit. Go here.

DEAN
No way.

DUKES
We lost 30 minutes already.

Dean stares into the empty distance down the road.

DUKES (CONT'D)
You wanna win? Trust me.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 coughs up geysers from the rear wheels. It veers off the road and through the scrub brush flats.

DEAN (O.S.)
Shit, shit, shit!

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

#99 jumps into a dry river wash lined with scrub. #99 fishtails onto a dirt road. A huge dust plume trails. A rocky road repeatedly BLASTS the undercarriage around the new weld.

INT. #99 - DAY

Scrub trees line the track.

DEAN
Where is it?

DUKES
Trust me.

DEAN
I can't see it.

DUKES
Coming up in 3-2-1... Now!

Dean swerves onto the main road and grunts his relief. A lime green blur flashes next to him. The #1 truck nearly sideswipes #99. Dean gasps and SLAMS the brakes.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The #1 Death Skull truck pulls away. #99 skids into its dust.

 DUKES (O.S.)
 Get him!

#99 ROARS in pursuit.

INT. #1 DEATH SKULL TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

Reese spies #99 in his mirror. He spots an approaching curve. He fishtails, kicking up a wall of dust.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean squints into the blinding cloud.

INT. #1 DEATH SKULL TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

In Reese's rear view mirror, #99 disappears in dust. Reese and Lesser smile. Reese holds the track, aiming straight off the road then at the last minute yanks the wheel right.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean peers into the emptiness. Suddenly a berm appears at the curve. Dukes yells as Dean heaves the wheel right.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 climbs the berm in a four-wheel drift, hangs at the edge then slides back into the #1 truck's dust cloud.

INT. #99 - DAY

The dust thins. The green blur becomes a green truck.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 closes. The trucks grow nose-to-nose. Lesser flips the bird. The trucks are like Roman chariots-- combat-close.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes' head jerks from the #1 truck to the map.

DUKES

Um! Um! Um!

DEAN

Busy!

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

An aging single-track wooden bridge CREAKS. A trickle of water oozes beneath, but the banks are too tall to jump. In the distance, two dots with brown contrails grow large.

DUKES (O.S.)

Bridge!

The trucks' hefty grilles surge ahead, first one then the other. The huge tires shake and spit gravel. Shocks and springs absorb tremendous blows.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean glances at Reese. Fear fights determination and hatred. Dean literally stands on the gas pedal. The engine's ROAR is deafening.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

One set of tires locks up, skidding to the shoulder. The other tires blast over the bridge, shaking it to its core.

The locked tires slide just over the edge of the bank then, CRUNCH, the frame high centers as the front tires dangle.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean and Dukes gasp then scream in triumph.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 tears away from the bridge and the stranded #1 truck.

SUPERIMPOSE:

Map of Baja California. A drawn course line snakes south 1/2 the distance to La Paz as the trip odometer rolls to 0555.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 RATTLES over rocky dirt as it crests a small rise. A distant pit area nestles in a box canyon. Helicopters circle and land. Abrams' copter is prominent.

EXT. PIT STOP #2 - DAY

#99 decelerates into the busy pit area. Vehicle number flags FLAP in the strong wind. #99 jerks into its stall.

The tires lock up and slide to a halt. A dozen feet, dwarfed by massive tires, scramble around the corners. Power tools attack. The hood comes up for inspection. Gas pours into the tank. Dukes takes the wheel.

CREWMAN 2

It's wild. A quarter of the field is broken or lost.

CREWMAN 3

Reese never showed.

DEAN

We found him.

CREWMAN 2

The Number 3 truck got hit by cross-traffic.

DEAN

(voice wavers)

120 mph plus the other guy--
That's a trash compactor impact.

EXT. TEAM RUSH'S PIT - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Danny Rush's crew clowns on #3.

CREWMAN 2 (V.O.)

They said it wasn't a local. Some black SUV.

Danny Rush smiles, tits on head.

EXT. PIT STOP #2 - DAY (RETURN TO PRESENT)

Dean shivers then sets his mouth.

CREWMAN 2

Daddy's home!

Abrams runs toward them from his helicopter, waving his arms.

DUKES
Kiss him for us.

#99's tires toss debris as it hustles from the pits.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

A motorcycle kicks up a rooster tail. It jumps. Scattered spectators wave. Behind him, a trophy truck appears-- #99. The truck catches the motorcycle as the road narrows.

INT. #99 - DAY

The men peer into the dust.

DEAN
That's all he's got.

DUKES
Well, he better move all he's got
before I give him all I got.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The motorcycle slips aside and #99 blows past. The bike is a ghost in #99's dust.

The #29 Porche SMASHES it from behind. The rider heaves backwards over the car, which slides to a halt just off the track. The #29 team runs back toward the rider.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny aims her camcorder at two trophy trucks sprinting toward a fork.

SUNNY
Moment of choice for two brutal
racing machines. Which fork holds
the answer?

Her brow furrows as she ponders her investigation notes.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The #27 Russian trophy truck blasts through one fork. The #88 Chinese trophy truck grabs the opposite fork. They stare at each other as the roads parallel.

#27 RATTLES through a rough patch and sways through gravel as #88 pulls away on the smooth main track.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY

#99 grinds its way up a steep slope. Jackrabbits and lizards scurry out of the way, only to be snatched by raptors.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny's iPad refreshes its race status. #99 has passed half the competitors. She's nods, impressed.

SUNNY
Crushed half the field.

She taps Dean's thumbnail photo and it fills the screen.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
You're a dancing machine.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean splashes his face with water. Both men are beat, shoulders sagging, heads hung low.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 goes slightly airborne as the road hits a bend. It lands in loose rocks and slides off the road into the brush.

DEAN (O.S.)
Watch it!

#99 tears through the brush like a brick through glass.

DUKES (O.S.)
You wanna win or not!

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

In the foothills, the #2 Lion truck slumps beside the road with blown tires. Blackstone feverishly changes a tire.

#99 blows by, painting him with dust. Blackstone's cures are lost in the CRUNCH of gravel as #99 disappears.

DUKES (O.S.)
Hell, yeah!

EXT. RACE COURSE - LATER

#99 races down a long straight stretch, alone.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes drives with one hand and chugs soda with the other. They grunt as the road suddenly turns rocky.

DUKES
They should have started us up front. I'd be up with the leaders.

DEAN
We'd be up with the leaders.

DUKES
Hell, I'd be the leader.

DEAN
We.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY

#99 climbs a rocky road along a mountain ridge. It's straight down hill every direction except victory.

The sun begins to set, painting the rugged terrain crimson.

INT. SUNNY'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Sunny points her camcorder at the sunset.

SUNNY
Mountain peaks are stealing the sunset. Below me, driving lights flick on for the most grueling and dangerous segment of the Baja 1000. Pitch black night in the Sierra Giganta Mountains and the rain-soaked detours.

Sunny reluctantly pulls out her credit card.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 (to herself)
 For the win. For the Pulitzer.

The pilot swipes the card then looks at her with pity.

ANCIENT PILOT
 (in Spanish)
 Nada.

Sunny sighs and pockets the worthless plastic.

SUNNY
 This is Sunny Richards, signing off
 for the long night. Join me live
 tomorrow at the finish line.

EXT. RACE COURSE - NIGHT

#99 blasts through the darkened landscape. Scrub trees flash in jittery lights; their limbs clutch at #99. Two wrecks jump out like hanging bodies at a haunted house then vanish.

SUPERIMPOSE:

Map of Baja California. The drawn course line snakes south 3/4 the race distance as the trip odometer rolls to 0790.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Over a rise, garish white lights appear in the distance.

DEAN
 (beat)
 That's it. Last pit stop.

EXT. FINAL PIT STOP - NIGHT

#99's tires lock up. Dust rises like a fine mist. The crew descends like locusts, pouring gas and spinning off the tires to the WHIR-GROWL of power tools.

Dean and Dukes stagger around #99 to switch sides but they're mobbed by the rest of the ecstatic crew. The drivers shake with confused fatigue.

MACDONALD
 You got the lead!

DUKES
 No shit?

CRANK

Never seen so many breakdowns and
crashes. Must have an angel ridin'
on your roll bar. Or a devil.

Team Abrams crushes together like a rugby huddle, laughing
and screaming. Dean and Dukes grin at each other.

Over the last rise, two sets of lights rush at the pits.
Abrams runs at them, shaking his fists like an angry bear.

ABRAMS

Get back on the course!

Dean grabs the wheel. Crank leans in Dukes' side.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Crank points at the map: a sharp turn near a river, a
traverse along a mountain ridge, a reversal back on course.

CRANK

You're here. There's fresh flooding
here and here. Info is sketchy.
Watch for washouts and gullies and--
hell, just watch out--

Abrams drags Crank away from #99.

EXT. FINAL PIT STOP - NIGHT

Abrams kicks the rear tire.

ABRAMS

Go, go, go!

#99 sprays rocks and dirt at him. He spins away coughing.

DUKES (O.S.)

(tired enthusiasm)
Woo hoo!

DEAN (O.S.)

This is one long-ass race...

EXT. RACE COURSE - NIGHT

A dozen lamps from above #99's cab and the grille stream
sunshine onto the faint road. It's not enough.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dean strains to stay on the winding road. His foot lifts from the gas. He wipes his eyes. The speedometer drifts down through 70 mph. Dukes yanks a drink from his mouth.

DUKES

You lookin' for a parking space?
Punch it!

EXT. RACE COURSE - NIGHT

#99 SPLASHES across a stream that appears like a sword flash.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dukes groans as #99 chatters over invisible washboard.

DUKES

Pull over.

DEAN

What? No!

DUKES

I gotta piss.

DEAN

Hold it!

Dukes' eyes bug out. He holds his stomach.

DUKES

I can't!

DEAN

I told you not to drink so--

DUKES

I'm gonna be sick. And I'll still
have to piss.

Dean snatches a water bottle.

DEAN

Fill it and pitch it.

As #99 bounces over washboard, Dukes pees in the bottle, misses, pees on himself, overflows the bottle then drops it on the floorboard.

BURNELL (CONT'D)
Awwwwww!

DUKES
Awwwwww!

EXT. RACE COURSE - NIGHT

#99 ROARS through the ghostly landscape. The moon disappears.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dean strains into the darkness. A rock SMACKS the body.

INT. #99 - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

#99's dash panel MORPHS into a dilapidated 1940's truck.

INT. 1940'S PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

A SMACK of hand to cheek and the CRY of a child.

DEAN'S FATHER (O.S.)
I told you-- OK, stop bellyachin'.
Looky here. You knock off that
crying shit and you can steer.

Tears stain a young boy's cheeks-- Bobby Dean at age six. He sits on a lap holding the huge wheel with tiny hands. A heavy boot smashes the accelerator. The engine RACES.

The wind SHRIEKS as speed builds. Young Dean starts to smile. The speed intensifies. The wheel shakes in his hands. It MORPHS into the modern steering wheel of Dean's pickup truck.

INT. DEAN'S PICKUP TRUCK - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Dean holds a shaking steering wheel as he BUMPS down a country road. Buddy's tiny hands also grip the wheel.

BUDDY
Faster! Faster!

Dean's eyes well with pride. He pulls his hands away.

Dean's pickup wheel MORPHS into an 18-wheeler's giant, steering wheel. Buddy's tiny hands struggle for control.

Dean grabs the wheel. His fists fight for control. Ahead, an ancient truck with a graffiti-soiled trailer -- the one from the sandlot race course -- pulls in the way. They CRASH.

INT. #99 - NIGHT (RETURN TO PRESENT)

Dean jerks the steering wheel. The dark horizon jerks.

DUKES
You're killing me.

EXT. RACE COURSE - NIGHT

#99 is little more than stabbing headlights in the gloom. The full moon casts flashing shadows between the clouds. #99's engine LUGS DOWN as it strains up a rocky road.

EXT. #99 - NIGHT

Rocks BANG the undercarriage. One strikes the weld.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dukes groans his fatigue, yanks at his harness and stretches his legs. He checks the map.

DUKES
We're coming up on a "Y"...

#99 passes an offshoot.

Dean groans as a bounce heaves him against his straps.

DEAN
Turn?

Dukes' helmet BANGS the frame as he stares at the map.

DUKES
No. Um, I don't think... no.

Dean coughs up a painful laugh.

DEAN
You're a hell of a driver, but stick to the oval. You suck at maps. I'm just saying.

Dukes salutes Dean's compliment with a soda and chugs it like a drunk with the shakes. His arms sag with every bounce.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Go easy on the piss generator.

DUKES

Go hard on the gas. Never had my
ass pounded like this.

DEAN

That's what she said.

DUKES

Suddenly, I'm in love with asphalt.

EXT. RACE COURSE - NIGHT

#99 grinds up a steep incline. Ghostly images flash by.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dean chokes on a fatigued yawn. He strains to see then wipes
sweat from his face. He gets a far-off look.

INT. DEAN'S STOCK CAR - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Dean's exhausted face pours sweat as the pit crew swarms his
car. He glances at the "August Atlanta Race" leader board,
which glows 95F. Dean's in First Place.

A competitor ROARS past and back to the track. The CREW CHIEF
is hopping mad as he shoves the team away from #1 and buries
his furious mug in Dean's face.

CREW CHIEF

You just lost the lead!

Dean gasps for air as he glances at Buddy's balsa racer. #1
drops off the jack. Dean yanks the car into the lane.

INT. #99 - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

The speedometer drops to 60mph as the engine strains uphill.

DUKES

Come on. Come on.

Dean glances at Buddy's racer.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Quit playing with toys. Eyes on the
road, not your boy.

The road drops. The horizon heaves up.

DUKES (CONT'D)

You got his name shit all over the hood. You racing for the win or for the boy?

DEAN

For winning the boy.

DUKES

Give me the damn wheel!

DEAN

When you grow up.

DUKES

Grown up enough to take you.

DEAN

Can't take me until you finish.

DUKES

From the guy who finishes second.

DEAN

I'll take that paycheck over no paycheck. Your sponsors must love rebuilding your cars.

DUKES

They love building for winners.

The engine RACES as the tires momentarily slip.

DEAN

It's not like I pissed my winnings away.

DUKES

I don't know. I distinctly remember the smell of urine-- when you sucker-punched me.

DEAN

And saved your life at the bar.

DUKES

A beer would have done better.

They gasp as the undercarriage reports two big ROCK STRIKES.

DEAN

Winning's just beer money to you.

DUKES

It's beer love to me.

DEAN

You could have settled for second.
We'd be pounding beers, not beating
our asses against this rock pile.

DUKES

You could've taken second. Again.
You like being Number Two.

Dean chokes the steering wheel.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Give you more time to play Daddy.
(sarcastic)
Like you were there for your kid--

BAM! Dean's fist SLAMS Dukes' helmet into #99's frame. Dean is shocked at his own knee-jerk reaction. Too late.

BURNELL

Sorry--

DUKES

Motherfu--!

BAM! Dukes' fist SMACKS Dean's helmet against the frame.

EXT. RACE COURSE - NIGHT

#99 swerves left over the shoulder berm, off the race course and onto a rough gravel road.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dean's right jab SLAMS Dukes' faceplate. Dark liquid splatters the inside.

DUKES

You broke my goddamn nose!

DEAN

Again, ass-wipe!

Dukes tears into Dean with both fists.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

The gravel track narrows between the cliff and the raging river. #99 skids off the race course toward the river.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

The truck fills with the sounds of animal grunts.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

The truck clips a limb, RIPPING Dukes' window webbing away. #99 skitters on the ravine's edge over the swollen river.

The front passenger tire THUDS into a foot-high boulder, heaving the passenger side of #99 into the air.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dukes is thrown violently up into the roof. Although his safety harness keeps him in place, it stuns him. Dean punches Dukes again and steers over another rock.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

The front passenger tire THUDS into another boulder, chipping the wheel. The suspension travels upward to SLAM the body.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dukes flies up. Dean's punches get the upper hand. Dukes recovers. He lunges with another flurry of blows.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

#99 races toward the ravine's edge.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

With a desperate bellow, Dean lunges and unlocks Dukes' safety harness. He heaves #99 into a sharp left turn and BANGS over another boulder. Dukes flies from the vehicle.

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT

The passenger side wheels skitter along the river's edge, spraying gravel and dirt. #99 skids to a stop.

Dean explodes from #99, sprints to the ravine and stares hard. The river is a black gash through a moonscape.

DEAN
Dukes! Dukes! Dukes!

Dean runs back to #99.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dean frantically grabs the mic. The radio is shattered.

DEAN
Stupid... stupid... stupid.

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Dean gets out, yanks off his helmet and listens. The river GURGLES. #99's hot engine POPS and PINGS. A coyote HOWLS.

A man's silhouette appears.

Dean starts to run away, but the man tackles him in front of the headlights. Dean desperately kicks him off.

The two men stagger up. There stands Dukes.

They wrestle to the ground, flailing/punching. Dean grabs his helmet and rises above for the final smash. Dukes lies in the same position as at Daytona-- helpless. Dean trembles in hesitation.

DEAN (V.O.)
Heroes don't hit the helpless.

SERIES OF SCENES - DUKES (FLASHBACK)

1. Dukes bats away the rattlesnake.
2. Dukes points out the detour to save the race.
3. Dukes salutes Dean with a soda.

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT (RETURN TO PRESENT)

Dean throws his helmet aside and plops down next to Dukes.

DEAN
No, no, no...

DUKES
(ironic groan)
You alright?

DEAN
Just resting. Sorry... I--

DUKES
Me, too. If I thought the road made
me punchy, your right jab--

BANG! A pistol shot. Dean throws his body across Dukes. He
stares up at Dean like he's insane.

DEAN
Too soon?

DUKES
Way.

BANG! Another shot.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

The men hustle up a rise then slither to a viewpoint.

An SUV blocks the road. Mariachi music drifts through the
night. Two SILHOUETTES laugh and jabber in Spanish as they
shoot pistols at glow lights stuck in a scrub tree.

Dean and Dukes relax.

One man opens the liftback. Its lights expose rifles,
puncture strips and equipment. Dean and Dukes whisper.

DEAN
What. The. Fu...

The men's faces are caught in the lights.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Those guys were at the bar. I
thought they were gonna kill you.

The men spike a puncture strip to the ground and rope it to
the bumper. They hide the SUV in a nearby depression.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Sabotage.

DUKES
We just drove past that spot.

DEAN
Yeah. We always get through.

The distant growl of a trophy truck drifts to them. Faint headlights appear. More follow. Dean looks horrified.

DUKES
We gotta do something.

DEAN
I got nothing.

DUKES
We could sneak up on them and--

DEAN
Seriously?

Dukes yanks out his cell. Dean stifles a snort as he tracks the incoming trophy truck.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(like the Verizon Man)
Can you hear me now?

The trophy truck ROARS toward the spikes. Dean tenses.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Dammit.

FOOM! Two tires blow up. Then, for a shocking instant, the desert is lit by the cell's camera strobe.

The trophy truck veers off road and CRASHES down a ravine. The two silhouettes bellow.

DUKES
Oops! Auto-flash.

BANG! A pistol echoes in the empty night. Dirt sprays them.

DUKES (CONT'D)
Holy shit!

Dean and Dukes scramble back to #99. More shots WHIZ from the dark. Bullets SNAP as they strike the ground. The men pile in #99. It ROARS away.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - LATER

#99 hurries along the gravel road, blind except for the moonlight. The mountains are jagged shapes along one side.

#99 veers wildly, barely missing boulders and trees. Its light array flicks on. Night becomes day.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Wide-eyed, Dukes stares at Dean.

DUKES
They'll find us!

DEAN
You wanna find a cliff?

Dukes points to his right.

DUKES
Look!

EXT. INTERSECTING MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

Headlights pierce the darkness, aimed straight at #99.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dean catches something to the left. He points.

DEAN
Look!

A second set of lights races for the gravel crossroad, which rises to a saddle.

DEAN (CONT'D)
They're trying to cut us off!

DUKES
Assholes! You're on our side! We're your golden goose! It says Abrams on the side of our truck! What the hell am I saying?

The lights grow closer and closer.

DEAN
In this dark, they can't tell who they're shooting at. And they're way past talking.

Dukes grips #99.

DUKES
Must go faster. Must go faster.

Dean leans forward to the steering wheel. The men scream as #99 races up the saddle, gunfire flashing around them.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD INTERSECTION - NIGHT

#99 flies up and over the saddle. The two SUVs crash into each other. The wrecks tumble off the road, catching fire. #99 speeds away as the blaze lights up the nearby crags.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

#99 sprays rocks through a turn. Brush SLAPS on the sides. The mountains give way to squat hills cut by flooded ravines.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

The men share a "what just happened" moment.

DUKES

I think the Tooth Fairy just changed sides.

DEAN

The truth will set you free.

DUKES

But first it will piss you off.

DEAN

Now, someone's trying to bury the truth.

INT. SUNNY'S LA PAZ HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sunny pushes through the door and collapses on the squeaky bed with a heavy sigh. She pops up immediately.

SUNNY

Break time's over.

She pulls out Dean's pen -- Never Follow -- and cracks a tiny smile. She unfolds her investigation diagram then traces with the pen between the money elements.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

When in doubt, follow the money.

On her tired laptop, she clicks through a Google search for "illegal money" and "Mexico," muttering the links as she goes. It offers links for: Mexican Indians demand rights and resources; Armed vigilantes battle drug cartels; Mexican banks flush with cash; Mexican government investigates deposits; and Mexican Mafia grows.

Nothing registers. She frowns her defeat and yawns at a wall clock: 1:00 am. Her e-mail program CHIMES. She opens the doc: an overdraft on her checking account. Her shoulders sag.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dukes licks his lips, eyes wide as a paranoid.

DUKES

Think there's more ambushes?

DEAN

One per customer. Besides, we're off course. In the dark, they can't find us. I just gotta keep this old gal on the straight and narrow until we--

CRASH. A helicopter's landing skid smashes Dean's side.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

#99 skids sideways toward a ravine. Rocks splatter into the dark water. #99 hits bumps, going slightly airborne.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

The horizon leaps and dives as Dean struggles for control. The two men share a look of terror.

The chopper's landing skid SMASHES the roof. They duck.

DUKES

Stop! Stop!

DEAN

We stop and they kill us!

Dean spies a big mogul. He swerves the vehicle at it.

DUKES

Watch the hill! Watch the hill!

The helicopter's lights get closer as it plunges to crush them. Dean peers out the side to track its progress.

DEAN

Keep coming! Keep coming!

DUKES

What?!

#99's hood dives momentarily as it strikes the mound and heaves into the sky, accompanied by a BONE-CRUNCHING CRASH.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

#99 bounces up from the mogul to SMASH into the helicopter's skid. The stricken aircraft lurches to port, tips hard and digs in its whirling rotors in a spray of desert dust.

The blades SHATTER, tossing the ancient fuselage into the rocky ground. It slides in a debris pile and explodes!

INT. #99 - NIGHT

The men wheeze and shudder as the fire recedes.

DEAN

Call in the ambush. Get help.

Dukes checks his cell.

DUKES

Still no bars.

Dukes starts typing an SOS text to the police noting the sabotage. Dean pulls out Sunny's business card. He savors the name.

DEAN

Add Sunny's number.

DUKES

Stupid auto-flash. Don't wanna win that bad.

Dean laughs tightly as he glances at the balsa racer.

DEAN

We left winning in the rear view mirror when you lit up those thugs at the ambush.

SERIES OF SCENES - #99'S NIGHT ESCAPE THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

1. #99 slips between boulders.
2. #99 gets whipped by scrub trees.
3. #99 SPLASHES through a rushing stream.

SUPERIMPOSE:

Map of Baja California. The drawn course line snakes south from Ensenada to La Paz with a large detour. A second line creeps through the mountains: shorter, beating the detour.

INT. #99 - NIGHT

Dean's eyes are feverish. Images flash before him:

1. Racers tear across the finished line to the ROAR of engines and the SCREAMS of the crowd.
2. Winning racers cut victory donuts, smoking tires on the track or throwing grassy clods in the infield.
3. Volleys of champagne corks and gushing foam.
4. Dozens of ecstatic men hugging.
5. A rush of checkered flags slash the air then reveal--
6. Dean as a young boy: smiling, crying, laughing, then crying as his father SLAMS the pickup door and drives away.
7. Buddy smiling from Dean's lap in the truck, crying from the door as Dean leaves in his racing gear, laughing atop Dean's shoulders surrounded by his NASCAR crew, crying as DEAN'S EX (30) carries him away after Divorce Court.
8. Dean's devastated face in the courtroom as Buddy, his arms reaching for Dean, disappears with Dean's Ex.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Dawn breaks. The colorful desert reveals itself. Plants open. Birds flit. Crawly things search for breakfast.

#99 blasts through, scattering loose rocks, debris and every living thing, beating every obstacle, trailing dust.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean and Dukes frantically scan. Nothing. They share a hopeful grin. Dukes checks the map.

DUKES

We're close.

DEAN

Close only counts in horse shoes,
hand grenade and--.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Hidden by a depression, the dirt race course suddenly appears, but at a sharp angle. #99 hits a mogul. Airborne!

#99 bounces uncontrollably and skids into soft sand. Stuck. One tire spins uselessly.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACE COMPLEX - DAY

Sunny slumps against a media truck and studies her iPad. Most trophy trucks are scratched, many with crashes.

SUNNY

What are the odds?

#99's status lists as UNKNOWN.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99's spinning tire sprays a sand geyser. Their heads pop out.

BURNELL

Shit!

WILLIAMS

Shit!

The tire stops spinning. The engine purrs a low-pitch THRUM. Dukes leaps out and heaves against the rear bumper as Dean GUNS the engine.

DUKES

I can't believe that they want to kill their own drivers!

DEAN

You caught them sabotaging the course! They lost at least four guys and two trucks in the ambush! And blew up their helicopter! We know too damn much!

Dukes freezes. Less than a mile behind-- a dust contrail.

DUKES

Uh, oh. Dude, we got company!

#99 rocks back and forth. Dukes heaves for his life.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Come on!

A black SUV takes shape at the tip of the dust trail.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Go! Go! Go!

A bullet ZIPS by. The tires catch and #99 pops free. Bullet geysers plow around the sand.

As #99 ROARS away, Dukes jumps onto it and swings his feet inside. The truck rockets across the uneven ground.

The front tire THUDS over a bump. Dukes' hands break loose. He hangs by his legs, helmet scraping the rough ground.

Dukes see his own death. Another bounce swings him up to catch #99's side, but he's still off-balance. A bullet SHATTERS the driving light above him.

Dukes' hands break free. As he screams, Dean's hand grabs Dukes' chest. Then Dean's other hand grabs Dukes' chest.

The engine dies to idle and they pitch forward. They lock eyes. Dean yanks him inside.

DUKES (CONT'D)

(accusing)

You slowed down!

DEAN

Just resting.

#99 is less than a football field ahead of a filthy black SUV. A tail light SHATTERS. A spare tire EXPLODES.

INT. #99 - DAY

Gunfire SHATTERS the dead radio, splattering both men with shrapnel. They duck.

DEAN

Joke's on them. It's already dead.

Another hit PINGS off the frame then wedges in the dash. A RICOCHET SLAMS Dean's helmet. His head jerks to the side.

Two more rounds RICOCHET inside. A fire extinguisher latched to the frame EXPLODES, spitting white smoke into the cab.

Something strikes Dukes as he twists to track the assailant.

DUKES

(groans)

He's gaining!

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 races across the open flats. More rounds chase the tires. Bullets kick up dust in front of #99.

DUKES (O.S.)
His aim's getting worse!

DEAN (O.S.)
He ain't James Bond!

Fifty yards behind, the assassin leans out and aims.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean touches Buddy's balsa racer. His eyes well up. His hands twist on the wheel-- no way in hell.

DEAN
Lock it up!

Dukes gets half of a "huh?" out of his mouth before his helmet SLAMS into the frame from a hard turn.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

#99 veers left. The SUV slides wide. #99 veers back right, a 120mph freight train aimed at the SUV. It's going to ram. The SUV skids and dives behind #99, shooting wildly. A light above the cab SHATTERS.

The SUV draws even with #99's passenger side, and only 50 feet away. The pistol comes out again. The shooter glares at them. It's the Gang Leader from the Full Throttle Bar.

INT. #99 - DAY

The men gasp. Dukes fumbles out his cell, shoots the Gang Leader's photo and attaches it to his SOS text.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The SUV is barely 20 feet away. The pistol is huge! He FIRES at #99's engine. A fender SPLINTERS.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes notes his cell.

DUKES

I got bars! I got bars!

He hits send. A vicious bounce knocks the phone outside. Dukes stares after it then stares at the huge pistol.

DEAN

Get down!

Dukes ducks, comes face-to-face with Buddy's balsa racer then locks eyes with Dean. Crazy determination envelopes him.

Dukes pops up in his seat and blocks the Gang Leader's view of Dean. Dukes takes a deep breath, tenses and closes his eyes. Dean is amazed and grateful as he "blocks" for him.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The SUV veers away to the right, kicking up a dusty wake.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dukes wheezes out his held breath. His eyes peek open to see the SUV disappear in the brush.

DUKES

Yay!

(beat)

Ow!

Dean reaches for Dukes and checks him out.

DEAN

You OK?

Dukes stiffens, but nods. Dean does a double take past Dukes. They scan outside in disbelief.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Where'd he go?

Dukes coughs then looks surprised at the pain.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Out of bullets?

DUKES

Killers never run out.

Dean backs off the throttle. The temperature gauge falls to the yellow arc. Dean checks the rear. Two trophy trucks are right on top of them.

DEAN
Witness Protection Program!

Dukes settles back into his seat with a groan.

DUKES
Well... that hurt.

Dean stares at Dukes' jacket. The shoulder is crimson.

EXT. #99 - DAY

Behind the grille, the radiator hose has a pinhole leak.

INT. #1 DEATH SKULL TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

Lesser points at #99 ahead, steam coming from beneath.

LESSER
Can't believe he's got the lead.

REESE
Payback time, bitch.

INT. #88 CHINESE TROPHY TRUCK - DAY

The #88 truck sprints just behind the #1 truck.

CHINESE DRIVER
(Mandarin, with subtitles)
The chase is over.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean gets a far-off look.

SERIES OF SCENES (FLASHBACK)

1. A waving checkered flag.
2. Dean's house of man-toys.
3. Dean's garage of motorbikes.
4. Dukes blocking the Gang Leader's shot.
5. Buddy, ecstatic on Dean's shoulders.

INT. #99 - DAY (RETURN TO PRESENT)

Dean looks from Buddy's racer to Dukes bleeding shoulder. He yanks his foot off the gas and waves at the two trucks.

DUKES
What are you doing?

DEAN
They got a radio!

The two trucks blast past on either side and keep going.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Hey! Hey!

Dukes manages a weak laugh.

DEAN (CONT'D)
What?

DUKES
No rules-no mercy. They just want to win.

Dean looks at Dukes.

DEAN
I just want to get you some help.

DUKES
There's help at the finish line.
Don't let 'em steal my band aids.

Dean is moved. He punches the accelerator.

DEAN
Let's see if this bucket of bolts
is worth what Abrams paid.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACE COMPLEX - DAY

Barely 100 yards behind the finish line, spectators surge against the flimsy security fence, cameras at the ready.

RACE ANNOUNCER
(over PA system)
Folks, this is incredible. The
leaders are bunched up, bumper to
bumper. This is the tightest finish
ever! Don't blink! You are about to
witness desert racing history!

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

At three miles from the finish line, the two other vehicles are 100 yards ahead of #99.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean touches Buddy's racer. Dukes gazes at Dean. He's fading.

DUKES

Look at you, driving to the rescue.
All the way to France.

DEAN

Trust me.

DUKES

(faint)
Your kid'd be proud.

Dukes' eyes clear. He smirks as the trip odometer rolls 1000.

DUKES (CONT'D)

Just win this damn thing, will ya.

The finish line fills their view: the crowd, the advertisements, balloons, flags, etc.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACE COMPLEX - DAY

Pandemonium! The fans, security, crews, and sponsors are one giant, hungry animal, starving for the meal about to race into their maw.

In the middle of it, Sunny reports with the camcorder on a tripod. Directly behind her, the giant screen displays a zoom shot showing that the lead vehicle is, in fact, three.

SUNNY

...a long shot of the leader. No,
there's three of them! It's going
to be a close, no, a photo finish!

Sunny scribbles a note: "SPORTS NEWS FEED! PHOTO FINISH!" She shoves the note to a MEXICAN TECHNICIAN and points towards a Mexican transmission truck with a dish on a pole.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Run!

She glances at the race board. #99 is on top. She checks her notes showing the disabled and lost vehicles.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Last to first? Nobody dances that good.

A SKINNY MAN bumps her as he strides by with a SQUAT MAN.

SKINNY MAN

Don't bet against him.

SQUAT MAN

I never gamble.

SKINNY MAN

Neither does he.

Sunny's eyes widen. Her head snaps around at the passing men. All her research flashes before her eyes. She knows! She draws herself erect, finally a confident journalist.

Sunny spins the camcorder from the tripod and sprints away. The tripod falls in the dirt.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - MOMENTS LATER

Sunny bursts into Matson's frenzied control box and shoves her list of disabled vehicles in his face.

SUNNY

Sabotage!

Matson smiles in condescension.

MATSON

It's a new course. There's bound to be a higher drop out rate.

SUNNY

How about murder rate?

Matson's face drops like a stone. He yanks her aside and waves off his entire staff.

MATSON

What the hell are you saying?

SUNNY

Abrams' fired drivers never picked up their \$50,000 checks, but I found blood on them.

Matson practically spits and turns to leave. Sunny grabs him.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Abrams is banking with your wealthy sponsor, and overdrawn. Now, he's winning the race with green drivers because his competition is broke down or lost. Dean can't be leading. Will 99 be disqualified?

Matson growls and pushes Sunny away.

MATSON

(over shoulder)

Do you even have a press pass?
There is no sabotage!

Sunny bites her lip-- how to get Matson to see...

SUNNY

(mutters)

Damn you, Dean. You lying sack of sh--

Her cell CHIMES a text. It's from Dukes. The cell flashes Dukes' photo of the Gang Leader in the black SUV-- pistol aimed at the camera.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Oh, my God!

Sunny practically tackles her cell phone in Matson's face. The Gang Leader points his pistol from the black SUV.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

This guy works for Abrams! He's shooting at Dean!

Matson's face turns white then red. He tears at his mustache.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Your race got a murder penalty?

Matson's face is frozen in shock and indecision.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

A dust contrail paints an arrow at the La Paz finish line. Clearing #1's cloud of dust, #88 appears, then #99.

#99 inches ahead of #88 then even with #1. Their huge tires surge ahead, first one then the other.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - DAY

Matson wheezes as he lumbers toward the finish line, yanking clumps from his mustache. Confused officials follow him.

Security frantically clears the finish line as the giant monitors show the three vehicles baring down on them. The crowd scrambles clumsily, like a scene out of "Jaws."

INT. #99 - DAY

The temperature gauge tickles the red line. Dean's fist POUNDS the steering wheel. His boot is flat to the floor.

EXT. #99 - DAY

The hasty weld begins to shear away from the vibrating undercarriage. The lower radiator hose pisses a stream.

INT. #99 - DAY

The temperature gauge crosses the red line. Suddenly, steam tears back from the hood and through the open cabin.

The finish line rushes at them. #99 is coming apart-- RATTLING and GRINDING. Dean's furious eyes reflect the checkered flag. He bellows in fear and triumph.

EXT. #99 - DAY

The radiator BLOWS UP in a geyser of steaming water.

EXT. RACE COURSE - DAY

The three racers are a 30-foot wide freight train, tearing at the desert floor, billowing dust, straining in One Last Lunge for the checkered flag.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - DAY

Sunny grabs a MEXICAN POLICEMAN and flips through her cell photos, first the Gang Leader shooting then Abrams with the Gang Leader. Buried by crowd noise, he nods as she shouts and holds up five fingers.

She jumps into the back of the Mexican transmission truck. She jumps back outside, swings her camcorder towards the giant screen and nods to the Mexican technician.

Matson grabs the ANNOUNCER'S mic. He chokes on mustache hair.

MATSON
(inaudible)
Disqualified.

#99 blasts through the finish line under the checkered flag, beating #1 by mere feet. The race clock seems to slow down.

The crowd is apoplectic. A thousand cameras CLICK. The giant screen flashes images of the photo finish.

#99's drive train freezes up and shatters. Its locked tires skid to a halt in front of the stands in a cloud of dust.

#1 and #88 THUNDER by, barely missing it.

INT. #99 - DAY

Dean blinks in amazement then SCREAMS relief and triumph. The crowd, the media, the flags, the giant screens showing his victory, all frozen in brilliant color.

EXT. #99 - DAY

Flames BURST from the engine. Dean leaps from #99 and pulls Dukes out. Their suits are bloody.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - DAY

Emergency vehicles race forward, sirens BLARING. Emergency crews douse #99's flames. Medics rush to Dukes' side.

Giant screens capture the fiery drama. One screen freezes the photo finish. Sunny shifts the camcorder to herself.

SUNNY
This is Sunny Richards reporting
live from the Baja 1000 desert
race. You've just witnessed a
record-breaking photo-finish and
destruction of the winning racer.
But, we're getting shocking reports
of a potential disqualification.

INT. SPORTS NEWS HQ - DAY

Things are clearly moving too fast for Harper. He's lost.

HARPER
Well... yes or no!

Suppressed giggles leak from the SPORTS NEWS TECHNICIANS.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - DAY

Unflustered, Sunny records the crowd surrounding Dukes.

SUNNY
Bill, I wish you could be here, in
the field, to cover this amazing
story. I'll be interviewing the
drivers as these shocking events
unfold.

Matson and shocked race officials circle Dukes' prostrate
form. Sunny hoists her camcorder above them.

Abrams rushes up to the officials, relieved and triumphant.

ABRAMS
Greatest finish in racing history!

INT. SPORTS NEWS HQ - DAY

A shaky camcorder image of Abrams appears on the big screen.
The crawl reads: Live from the Baja 1000 Desert Race.

ABRAMS
(on screen)
... finish in racing history!

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - DAY

Medics surround Dukes. Dean hovers above them. He spies
Sunny. She holds up her cell phone. Her eyes say: trust me.
Dean nods. Matson grabs three officials and huddles.

RACE ANNOUNCER
(over PA system)
Ladies and gentlemen, the race
officials are conferring to
determine the winner.

The crowd boos. Sunny slips next to Abrams, camcorder on.

SUNNY
I'm standing with the owner of Team
Abrams, the apparent winner of the
Baja 1000. Andy, your thoughts.

INT. SPORTS NEWS HQ - DAY

On the big screen, Abrams spikes his beer can.

ABRAMS
Son of a-- Huh?

SUNNY
What can you tell us about the officials delaying the winner announcement?

ABRAMS
Unbelievable! Unprofessional! It's right there, frozen on the screen!

SUNNY
And what can you tell us about the \$5 Million winner's prize money? Did it actually come -- in cash -- to Banco Mexicano from the Mexican Mafia?

Abrams chokes. He pushes her camera away and ducks into the crowd of officials, arms waving. Sunny's camera follows.

The shaky image fills the main monitor. Harper is speechless.

TILDEN
Did she just say Mexican Mafia?

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - DAY

The medics hoist Dukes on a stretcher. Dean, blood-stained and beaten, takes Dukes' hand.

DUKES
I'll be OK. Trust me.

Dean smiles. The giant screen displays: #99 DISQUALIFIED.

ABRAMS
What! I'll sue!

Dean's smile broadens-- duh.

INT. SPORTS NEWS HQ - DAY

On the big screen, the crowd is an angry mass of color.

SUNNY

A dramatic end to a hard-fought competition. With the race over, the question on my mind is--
(turns camcorder to
Abrams)

... will the loss of the \$5 Million prevent you from repaying your substantial gambling debt to the Mexican Mafia by money laundering the winnings?

The slack-jawed Abrams, watching his winnings and his safety disappear, belatedly registers Sunny's question.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Was the Mexican Mob behind the massive course sabotage? And the attempted murder of your own drivers?

Abrams chokes with rage and lunges at the camera. Abrams' image shakes as the camera retreats.

EXT. BAJA 1000 RACING COMPLEX - DAY

Abrams dodges around Sunny then freezes. The Gang Leader glares at him from the front of the crowd.

INT. SPORTS NEWS HQ - DAY

On the screen, Abrams quakes in horror and collapses, holding his left arm. The Mexican policeman steps toward Abrams with cuffs as nearby medics rush aid.

MEXICAN POLICEMAN

You are under arrest.

Sunny's camcorder swings from Abrams to the crowd to #99 to Dukes and back to Abrams weakly pushing away the cop. Harper and Tilden search for words.

HARPER

Extraordinary!

Bandaged, Dukes gives Dean thumbs-up as the medics hoist his stretcher into the ambulance. The vehicle lurches away, siren BLARING.

TILDEN

Well, this is a first. An arrest, live, on a sports network.

(MORE)

TILDEN (CONT'D)

(grudgingly)

And a plot uncovered by our...
own... investigative journalist.
Sunny, your thoughts?

Sunny swings the camcorder back to herself nonchalantly.
Behind her, the cops drag Abrams away. She smiles into the
camcorder. Dead air.

TILDEN (CONT'D)

As I was say--

SUNNY

Reporting and webcasting live from
the Baja 1000, I'm Sunny Richards.

Black screen. The anchors are frozen in confusion. The
technicians' jaws drop.

EXT. BAJA 1000 GROUNDS - DAY

The sun is low; the crowds are gone. Sunny helps Dean,
bandaged and slightly limping, through crews striking tents
and booths. A string of flags flutters to the ground.

Dean grins as broad as when he was signing the kids'
autographs.

SUNNY

You're awfully sunny for a gimp.

DEAN

I beat the entire field starting
from the ass end, survived at least
three murder attempts, and got to
bust Dukes' nose, again. Wish it'd
been Abrams. Nice work on him.

SUNNY

Abrams put in his application a
week before Banco Mexicano
announced the \$5 Million prize. No
experience, no trophy truck, no
crew. But a truckload of Vegas
gambling debts. Guess Winston and
Styles refused to play along. The
Mexican Mafia had a gun on Abrams,
too.

DEAN

That's nothing. They sicced a
helicopter on us.

(MORE)

DEAN (CONT'D)

In the dark, the Mexican Mob had no idea they were trying to kill their own golden goose. Liked to drive us into the flood.

SUNNY

Join the crowd.

Sunny shows the disabled vehicle list. Dean acts injured.

DEAN

And here I thought I'd won fair and square.

SUNNY

Really? At your first desert race?

DEAN

And your first major scoop. An arrest on national TV.

SUNNY

That was all Dukes, and you.

Sunny grabs Dean's ass like he did hers at the bar. A surprised Dean sees something deep in her eyes.

DEAN

Guess you're a real journalist.

Sunny kisses him and whispers in his ear.

SUNNY

Do journalists really say that?

A diesel truck RATTLES away. Truck tires CRUNCH to a stop nearby. Dean eyes the carcass of #99.

DEAN

So, that's what first place looks like.

DUKES (O.S.)

I've seen worse.

Sporting a nose guard, a bandaged Dukes grins from a 4X4.

DEAN

Bet you drive NASCAR.

They all laugh. Dean hangs into #99 and pulls out Buddy's charred racer. The car's belly says: "Drive Hard - Win - Buddy."

DEAN (CONT'D)
I've been running the wrong race.

SUNNY
What?

DEAN
My ex. Beats me every time.

SUNNY
And you lost every race. Why don't
you quit?

Dean thinks for a quick beat.

DEAN
'Cause I'm a winner.

Sunny smirks "duh." Dean's eyes go wide-- Captain Obvious finally gets it. He dials his cell as Dukes hobbles over.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Hey, Buddy, how ya doin'? Your Mom
let you watch me on Sports News?
(laughs)
Yeah, I done broke your car--
again.
(beat)
Better than winning. I helped my
new friend. Tell you what, I'll see
you soon. Yeah, real soon. Go get
your Mom.

Dean smiles grimly as he waits.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Call your lawyer. I'm coming for my
son.

Dean kills the cell then frowns in deep thought.

DEAN (CONT'D)
With my cost-more-than-his-weight-
in-gold lawyer.

He starts examining #99. Most of it is junk. He frowns at the
shot-up spare then kicks the tires.

DEAN (CONT'D)
You think these tires are worth
much?

DUKES
I think they're outa warrantee.

DEAN
I could scrap the body.

DUKES
It ain't our rig.

DEAN
Well, Abrams won't need it in jail.

Sunny ponders.

SUNNY
Maybe I could report on your story.

The men look blank. She shakes their shoulders as if chiding a confused child.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
Get public opinion on your side.
Grease the wheels with NASCAR. Show
them a real winner.

The men brighten. She shoves Dean onto #99's melted hood.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
Starting now.
(in an announcer's voice)
A long-shot, underdog, come-from-
behind, Cinderella story...

Dean struggles over #99's shattered body. He balances himself on #99's buckled roof and waves to the imaginary crowd. He hesitates; he needs something more.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
Too soon?

DEAN
Just resting.

Dukes hangs half inside #99 then pulls out a scorched soda. He shakes it then tosses it up to Dean.

Dean shakes it viciously then pops the spray at Sunny and douses himself with the remainder. Sunny scrambles up #99 and raises Dean's hand in victory.

SUNNY
Winner of the Baja 1000!

DEAN
Next year!

Dean's grin stretches all the way to Dukes.

FADE OUT:

THE END