



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Easy Rider

Easy Rider

Directed by: Dennis Hopper
©: Raybert Productions
Presented by: Pando Company
Presented in association with: Raybert Productions
Executive Producer: Bert Schneider
Produced by: Peter Fonda
Associate Producer: William L. Hayward
Production Manager: Paul Lewis
Location Manager: Tony Vorno
Post Production: Marilyn Schlossberg
1st Assistant Director: Paul Lewis
2nd Assistant Director: Len Marsal
Script Supervisor: Joyce King
Written by: Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, Terry Southern
Director of Photography: László Kovács
Additional Photography: Barry Feinstein *
Assistant Cameraman: Peter Heiser Jr
Gaffer: Richmond Aguilar
Electrician: Foster Denker
Best Boy: Mel Maxwell
Generator: Guy Badger
Key Grip: Thomas Ramsey
Still Man: Peter Sorel
Special Effects: Steve Karkus
Film Editor: Donn Cambern
Assistant Editor: Stanley Siegel
Art Director: Jerry Kay
Prop Master: Robert O'neil
Make-up: Virgil Frye
Titles: CineFX
Colour Processing: Consolidated Film Industries
Music Editing: Inc. Synchronfilm
Sound Mixer: Le Roy Robbins
Sound: Ryder Sound Services
Sound Boom: James Contrares
Re-recording: Producers Sound Service
Sound Effects: Inc Edit-Rite
Stunt Gaffer: Tex Hall
Consultant: Henry Jaglom
Transportation: Lee Pierpont
Cast:
Peter Fonda (*Wyatt*)
Dennis Hopper (*Billy*)
Luana Anders (*Lisa*)
Luke Askew (*stranger on highway*)
Toni Basil (*Mary*)
Karen Black (*Karen*)
Warren Finnerty (*rancher*)
Sabrina Scharf (*Sarah*)
Robert Walker (*Jack*)
Jack Nicholson (*George Hanson*)
Antonio Mendoza (*Jesus*)
Phil Spector (*Connection*)
Mac Mashourian (*bodyguard*)
Tita Colorado (*rancher's wife*)
Sandy Wyeth (*Joanne*)
Robert Ball, Carmen Phillips, Ellie Walker,
Michael Pataki (*mimes*)
George Fowler Jr (*prison guard*)
Keith Green (*sheriff at prison*)
Hayward Robillard (*cat man*)
Arnold Hess Jr (*deputy*)
Buddy Causey Jr, Duffy Lafont,
Blase M. Dawson, Paul Guedry Jr (*customers*)
Suzie Ramagos, Elida Ann Hebert,
Rose Leblanc, Mary Kaye Hebert,
Cynthia Grezaffi, Colette Purpera (*girls*)
Lea Marmer (*madame*)

Easy Rider's impact was made possible by a bold synthesis of the disparate styles, moods and practices with which 60s pop culture was awash. The acting paid homage to the Actors Studio and the groundbreaking experiments of John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1959) and Shirley Clarke's *The Cool World* (1963). The self-conscious use of the camera, especially the jump-cuts and zooms, also displayed the influence of the work of the various European new waves then flooding American art houses and film societies – the British Free Cinema, the French *nouvelle vague*, the Italian neo-realists from Antonioni to Fellini, and the Czech New Wave. The editing built on the frenetic cutting of Richard Lester and mid-60s television advertising, and the *cinéma vérité* of D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock. The underground films of Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, Andy Warhol and others suggested seemingly infinite possibilities of cinematic expression, some of which *Easy Rider* exploited and developed. The film's use of songs by Jimi Hendrix, The Band and other groups reflected the growing importance of rock music as a sophisticated complement to film narrative. Dennis Hopper's and Peter Fonda's 'apprenticeship' on Roger Corman's B-Grade youth pics accounted for *Easy Rider's* budget and scale.

Together with his collaborators, Peter Fonda turned *Easy Rider* into something more than a modernised Western. *Easy Rider* is an 'Eastern' which reverses, questions and rejects the expansionist impulses many Americans held sacred prior to the 60s. As Wyatt and Billy drive in-country away from Los Angeles, California, the end of the frontier becomes, to use William Burroughs' great phrase, the end of the human line. The idyll of 'the big score' proves as transitory and misleading as the golden dreams that derail the characters of the novels of Theodore Dreiser and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In spite of occasional lapses into obscurity, *Easy Rider* sustains its tragic vision of roads that eventually turn in on themselves or come to early and abrupt termination.

From beginning to bitter end, this simple story of two bikers on the road resonated with viewers in 1969 in a number of ways. The plot of the film may appear almost schematic at times, but its politics are far from simple. As *Easy Rider* was being written and filmed during 1967 and 1968, the mood of the 60s was undergoing an irrevocable shift. While only those with a bad sense of history would recall the decade as a simple time of sweetness and light, there was a strong consensus that those outside the status quo could fight for positive change and progress. During *Easy Rider's* production, the idealism of the 60s had so far weathered the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the escalation of military involvement in Vietnam and racial strife in major American cities. Harold Wilson's Labour government in the UK still enjoyed the glow from its 'white heat' of revolution. Lyndon Johnson's Great Society had not yet been derailed by partisan bickering in the Democratic Party. And the series of strikes and protests that rocked France in May 1968 underscored the belief that power truly was falling into the hands of the people.

But this belief proved to be founded on false optimism. In 1967, the year of the Summer of Love, from love-ins in San Francisco and Amsterdam to the Beatles singing 'All You Need Is Love', there was also the Six Day War between Israel and Egypt, civil war in Nigeria and the increasing deployment of US troops in Vietnam. Anti-war demonstrations were increasing in number and the tone of protest growing more militant. 1968 exploded in violence with the Tet Offensive, the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King,

Cathé Cozzi (*dancing girl*)
Thea Salerno, Anne McClain,
Beatriz Monteil, Marcia Bowman (*hookers*)
David C. Billodeau, Johnny David
(*men in pickup truck*)
Mick Mehas *
USA 1969©
95 mins
Digital 4K

* Uncredited

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Apocalypse Now: The Final Cut

Sat 1 Jun 15:00; Sat 8 Jun 19:40; Sat 15 Jun 19:40;
Sun 23 Jun 19:20

The Wages of Fear Le Salaire de la peur

Sat 1 Jun 17:40; Tue 11 Jun 20:15; Wed 19 Jun
14:20; Sun 30 Jun 14:40

The General + Cops

Sat 1 Jun 18:40; Wed 12 Jun 12:10

Cléo from 5 to 7 Cléo de 5 à 7

Sat 1 Jun 20:50; Wed 5 Jun 18:10 (+ intro
programmer Jelena Milosavljevic); Fri 14 Jun 20:50;
Fri 21 Jun 12:10

It Happened One Night

Sun 2 Jun 13:00; Mon 17 Jun 12:10; Tue 25 Jun
20:30

Badlands

Sun 2 Jun 20:45; Mon 10 Jun 12:20; Wed 26 Jun
18:15 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme
and Acquisitions)

Sullivan's Travels

Mon 3 Jun 18:10; Mon 10 Jun 20:50; Fri 14 Jun
14:45; Mon 24 Jun 12:10

North by Northwest

Mon 3 Jun 20:20; Thu 6 Jun 14:30; Tue 18 Jun
14:30

Easy Rider

Tue 4 Jun 12:40; Fri 7 Jun 21:00; Sun 16 Jun 20:35;
Sat 22 Jun 13:20

The Searchers

Tue 4 Jun 20:30; Thu 20 Jun 12:10; Sat 29 Jun
15:20

Where Is the Friend's House? Khaneh-je Doost Kojast

Wed 5 Jun 12:45; Sat 8 Jun 15:40; Wed 19 Jun
18:15 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-
Large); Wed 26 Jun 21:00

Alice in the Cities Alice in den Städten

Sun 9 Jun 20:20; Thu 13 Jun 12:00; Fri 28 Jun
12:20

Gun Crazy

Wed 12 Jun 18:20 (+ intro by Josephine Botting,
BFI National Archive Curator); Mon 24 Jun 20:30;
Thu 27 Jun 12:20

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rioting in American ghettos and university campuses, the street fighting and protests that shattered the Chicago Democratic Convention, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The feeling of collapse intensified through 1969 as the Vietnam War continued, and the counter-culture began to fall apart in the aftermath of the Manson murders and the disastrous Rolling Stones concert at Altamont speedway.

The makers of *Easy Rider* seemed to have known instinctively that the notion of the 60s as a decade of idealism, progress and hope for the future was as fragile and delicate as a strip of celluloid. Billy and Wyatt discover that the decade's optimism is akin to a brief, promising mirage like oil shimmering on the road's horizon. The reactionary fear of the Silent Majority, championed and goaded by Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew in the 1968 presidential campaign, emerged as the more dominant response towards the social and cultural change of the 60s. The hostile political climate was not helped by the fact that the militant politics of the Black Panthers, the Weathermen and the more pugnacious members of Students for a Democratic Society tended to inspire confrontation rather than understanding or co-operation.

In capturing this turmoil, *Easy Rider* reverses the premise of most Westerns. Traditionally, the lawlessness of the frontier is shown being tamed by the individual, family or state. It was John Ford's genius in *The Searchers* (1956) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) to show that such civilising forces had their price, but even his revisionism assumed that the frontier's taming was inevitable and necessary. *Easy Rider's* narrative, however, begins with a rejection of technocracy, an abandonment of the cities built since the West was won. Partially influenced by Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*, one of many novels by the German writer reissued in the 60s, Fonda wanted Billy and Wyatt's odyssey from Los Angeles to Key West to illustrate the rootlessness, loss of spirituality and destruction of nature created by America in the 20th century. As their journey unfolds, Billy and Wyatt would come to realise the materialism of their motives and yearn for deeper values and goals.

Easy Rider remains a landmark in low-budget independent filmmaking. Of all the criticisms levelled at *Easy Rider*, the glibbest and least supportable is that it has dated. The film works not simply as a vivid snapshot of the late 60s, but as a prophecy of the cynicism and exhaustion of the decades to come. The episodic narrative manages to encompass an eclectic range of the decade's cultural ferment. The communes, the interest in Eastern religions, the heightened awareness of civil rights, the biker and hippie subcultures, sexual liberation, the widespread experimentation with drugs, the romance of hitchhiking, the ever-shifting colours and styles of fashion, and the relevance and immediacy of rock music are all economically woven into an ostensibly artless storyline. The same narrative is strong enough to show how many of these ideas and movements would eventually fail or run aground in the 70s, and become consumed by their polar opposites in the 80s and 90s. *Easy Rider* is a film about the contradictions of the American pioneering spirit and the sheer waste and destruction that lies behind so much of the ambition underpinning the American Dream. *Easy Rider's* visual splendour does not obscure its tragic argument: the idealism of the 60s, like the money in Wyatt's gas tank, was too easily acquired and taken for granted, until it was squandered and violently destroyed.

Extracted from *Easy Rider* by Lee Hill (BFI Modern Classics, 1996)

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