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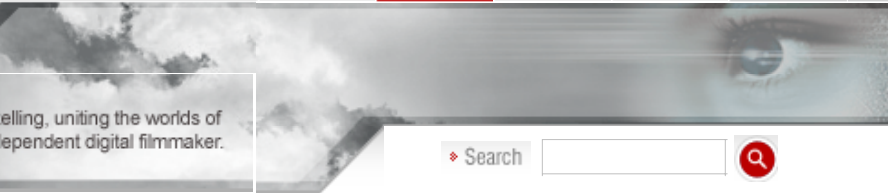
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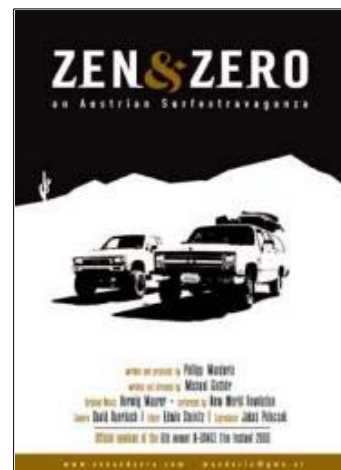
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Riding the Wave By Ron Steinman

I don't like to admit it, but I am a sucker for surfer films, at least the ones that show surfers riding the waves in some expectation of their reaching philosophical nirvana. Otherwise, why surf, or better yet, why drive thousands of miles in often horrible conditions, as some young men do, in search of that one, or if they are lucky, a number of difficult to catch waves. I do not surf. Surfing, though gives me vicarious pleasure, the best kind because it does me no physical or spiritual harm.



Knowing this, take a minute with me as I review a recent likeable documentary film called "[Zen and Zero](#)." It is about a trip five Austrian filmmakers, refugees, if you will, from a landlocked country in Europe, take from Los Angeles, to Baja, through Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and, to their final destination, Costa Rica. In Los Angeles they buy two used cars, take their surf boards, probably a change or two of clothing, I assume some extra cash, 2 DVX-100 cameras, a still camera or two and head into the wilderness of free-wheeling beach communities across the upper half of the southern hemisphere. Surprisingly, the cars hold up over rough roads and heavy driving. They later sell the cars to have enough money to return to L.A. They shoot everything in 24P mode to fit more material onto the screen, edit on Final Cut Pro and then color correct their work to Digital Beta. The quality of their pictures surprised them as it did me.



The movie runs 60 minutes and my interest rarely flagged. The shooting was of high quality, the editing clever and smart, the story sometime compelling. Knowing what the filmmakers did, and taking the trip with them as they did it, I could see they had a good time on their journey. I find it difficult to single out any one person on the team because it seems they all did a little bit of everything. It is a truly cooperative effort. The five young men are Michael Ginthor, David Auerbach, Jacob Polacsek, Philip Manderla and Edwin Steinita. Mostly I enjoyed accompanying these men on their journey but I had problems with a number of facets of the movie.

An original score by Herwig Mauer accompanies the film and usually sets the right tone, but I sometimes found it boring and overbearing. Less music and more natural sound would have been a better compliment to the pictures.

At times the voiceover, though good, descriptive and with not too many words filling my ears, was pretentious and had too much potted philosophy, as if the filmmakers needed reassurance about their mission, or the mission of surfers everywhere. Sometimes, especially in a documentary, the less said about why you are doing something, meaning finding and filling the screen and the air with someone else's psychology and philosophy, is better than saying too much to justify the reasons for the movie. Pictures and natural sound really do tell a story.



As much as I enjoyed the film, I had one other problem with it. As I toured with the crew, I learned about their cars, the roads they drove, the countryside, the beaches, the towns and villages, some of the people living in them, the waves and watching surfers doing what they do best, surfing. I know the star of the movie was the journey and the surfing that went with it, but I believe the audience deserved to know more about the individuals on the trip, who they were, and to hear them in words spoken to the camera explaining why they were on their quest. Those personal thoughts in someone's own words, even in German with subtitles, rather than the words of a narrator were missing. It would have allowed me to feel more a part of the adventure. Seeing the journey was not enough. But the filmmakers are young, so maybe next time.

At NBC News for 35 years, Ron Steinman was bureau chief in Saigon, Hong Kong and London, was a senior producer on Today and wrote and produced for Sunday Today. At ABC News Productions, he produced and wrote documentaries for A&E, TLC, Discovery, Lifetime and the History Channel. He has a Peabody, a National Headliner award, a National Press Club award, a International Documentary Festival Gold Camera Award, two American Women in Radio & Television awards and has been nominated for five Emmy's. He is a partner in Douglas/Steinman Productions, whose latest documentary, "Luboml: My Heart Remembers," aired on PBS' WLIW/21 and the History Channel in Israel, April 29, 2003. He is the author of, "The Soldiers' Story", "Women in Vietnam," and most recently, "Inside Television's First War: A Saigon Journal," University of Missouri Press, 2002.