



PHOTOS: FORREST ARAKAWA

SIGHT LINES

To McMullen, they're all blind corners—and he rails every one of them.

FLYING BLIND

FILMGOERS PACK THE HOUSE TO SEE BOBBY RIDE

AS A CROWD GATHERED FOR the March premiere of the documentary *The Way Bobby Sees It*, the film's subject, Bobby McMullen, knew he had just won a bet with co-producer Jason Watkins. The movie was playing at the Cascade Theater in McMullen's hometown of Redding, California, and Watkins, one half of the indie film outfit Poison Oak Productions, expected a turnout of maybe 300 people. McMullen bet they'd fill the house.

Though his visual impairment prevented McMullen, a Type 1 diabetic who has undergone double-organ transplants (kidney and pancreas) twice, from seeing the action on screen, he knew the Cascade Theater was packed. "The place seats about a thousand and I'm pretty confident we went over that," McMullen says. "Jason just kind of laughed about me winning the bet."

The hour-long film chronicles the life of an unlikely mountain bike racer. With the aid of a guide, who rides ahead and shouts directions, McMullen, 45, races up to 25 downhill and cross-country events a year. The film centers around one of his favorite DH races, the Downieville Classic, and though the notion of a blind rider surviving even one run on such treacherous terrain seems beyond belief, that's just a small part of the story.

Pro racer Mark Weir, a Downieville legend and all-around tough guy, has ridden as McMullen's guide and says it's an intense experience. "He doesn't want to go slow, he wants to go fast," Weir says. "He wants to pin it and he'll be up in your ass yelling at you. At Sea Otter, we were blasting, no-brakes, 30-mph-plus through bumps and I'm just yelling back at him to absorb or lean back. You just hope you get to the bottom without him slapping, but usually that's not the case. He's gonna go down eventually."

Indeed, riding blind comes at a cost. McMullen crashes often, and in the last year he suffered a broken wrist, multiple broken fingers, and had knee surgery to remove bone spurs. In addition to downhill, McMullen also does some endurance XC racing, including 8- and 12-hour races. He's eyeing the Tahoe Sierra 100 race in September.

"The guy is unbelievable," Weir says. "He's a bigger story than Sam Hill or any other downhill racer. If you ask me, his story is more inspirational than any cyclist besides Lance Armstrong."

The Way Bobby Sees It is available now on DVD. To purchase a copy, or for information on upcoming screenings, check out poisonoakproductions.com. —KIP MIKLER

praise

REALLY BAD DAYS



MORGAN MEREDITH

The good thing about a bad day is that it makes its presence known early. Often, one senses the approaching evils and ills before a ride even begins. Maybe the warning comes from a scratchy throat, or a splitting headache, or two flat tires on a freshly tuned bike.

Sometimes, the warning strikes after the first few pedal strokes. Disc brakes are rubbing, or worse, they feel like mush. A chain is skipping. A fork has blown its seal. Maybe the problem is physical. Legs are filled with cement. The front wheel wanders into every obstacle. Muscle cramps strike too early. And everyone has left you at the back. Alone. Sucking in solitude.

Maybe it's the weather. Drizzling in the morning. Seventeen degrees with cold, dark clouds on the horizon. There's sleet or snow or skin-searing heat. Darkness arrives an hour too soon. Or it's already dark.

The mid-ride routine becomes habit on these days. Check the rear cog to see if some freehub gremlin swapped your 34 for a 32 while you slept. Check to see if the brakes are rubbing or the tires are flat. Eat. Drink. Recover. And continue on, hanging by a thread.

Time is wasted searching for shortcuts, shorter routes, anything to shorten the ride. But the end comes, as it always does. Bottles are clinked. Shoes pried from swollen feet. Smiles and high fives. Commiserating in misery. Everything seems better after a bad day. And the turning over of a car engine is the first sour note welcoming you back to the din of the real world.

—Lou Mazzante