

Stoked The Rise and Fall of Gator

USA 2002

Director

Helen Stickler

Producer

Helen Stickler

Principal Photography

Helen Stickler

Peter Sutherland

Dag Yngvesson

Editor

Ana Esterov

Music

David Reid

©HMS Projects, Inc.

Production Company

A Helen Stickler film

Associate Producer

Zachary Mortensen

Post-production

Associates

Jaime Phillips

Rebecca Haimowitz

Julie 'Jigsaw' Ashcraft

Jennifer Gonzales

Matt Murphy

Camera/Sound

Jeff Glasse

Ian O'Roarty

Neil 'Skip' McCraw

Zach Mortensen

Tobin Yelland

Jack Alger

Laban Pheidias

George Ratliff

Jeff Warren

Tony Allard

Phil Badger

Awad Metni

Maximilian Lawrence

Ana Esterov

Adam Wade

Graphics

Jim Crean

Landie Swanberg

Additional Motion

Graphics

Lay Lewis

Stuart Weiner

Ana Hovanessian

Titles

Jim Crean

Landie Swanberg

Music Supervisor

Nichelle Bayer

Soundtrack

'I Don't Know' – Naked

aygun; 'She's My

Heroine' – Ministry of

ruth; 'Accelerate' – The

action; 'Surf Beat' –

Agent Orange; 'Laurie's

ament' – The Vidiots;

Fascination Street' –

Lavie Reid; 'Rise Above'

Black Flag; 'Sanity' –

ad Religion; 'California

ber Alles' – Dead

enedys; 'Human

annonball' – Butthole

urfers; 'Big Neon

litter' – The Cult;

space Age Love Song' –

Flock of Seagulls;

break the Grip of

hame' – Paris; 'Pretty in

ink' – Mark Rogowski;

Grasshopper' – Citizen

ird; 'Dudesblood' –

John Hogan, Mark

Rogowski

Sound Mix

Phillip Loeb

Aniel Perlin

With

Mark 'Gator' Rogowski

former professional

skateboarder (voice)

erry Jumonji

former professional

skateboarder

d Swank

former professional

skateboarder, skateboard

company owner

Michelle Chavez

high school friend

Jason Jessee

professional

skateboarder

Ken Park

former professional

skateboarder

Lance Mountain

professional

skateboarder

Jeff Newton

Zorlac Skateboards

John Hogan

former skate team

manager, former Vision

team manager

Kevin Staab

professional

skateboarder

Stacy Peralta

former skateboard

company owner

Moto

former Thrasher

magazine photographer

Steve Olson

skateboarder of the year

1978

Tony Hawk

Dave Duncan

former professional

skateboarders

Brad Dorfman

founder, Vision

Skateboards

Shepard Fairey

artist, skater

Rich Cook

former friend, skater

Steve Caballero

professional

skateboarder

Craig Johnson

former professional

skateboarder

Lou Statman

skater

Randy Janson

former Gullwing team

manager & friend

Brandi L. McClain

former fiancée to Gator

Billy Smith

former pro skater

Bill Silva

Gator's former agent

Ed Templeton

professional

skateboarder, artist

Kris Markovich

Mike Vallely

professional

skateboarders

Carol Leggett

journalist, former friend

Terry Jensen

Vista District Attorney

office

Detective Don Detar

Sergeant Richard

Castenada

Carlsbad Police

Department

John Jimenez

Gator's public defender

Cory Johnson

journalist

Ben Ward

skateboarder

Certificate

tbc

Distributor

Palm Pictures

tbc feet

tbc minutes

DTS stereo

In Colour

This documentary combining archive footage and recent interviews tells the true story of 1980s skateboard champion Mark 'Gator' Rogowski, who is currently serving a 31-year sentence for rape and murder. The film follows Rogowski's – and the sport's – rise to phenomenal popularity in the 1980s and on to the decline around 1990 of the spectacular vertical skating style Rogowski practised.

The sudden drop in his popularity and income has devastating effects on Rogowski's volatile, celebrity-addicted personality. Washed up at 21, he tries to hang on to success, displaying increasing signs of instability: he punches a fan, and in a state of extreme intoxication jumps from a hotel window. He changes his name to Mark Anthony, then experiments with born-again Christianity. Abandoned by his girlfriend, he tortures and sodomises a young woman he barely knows before killing her. Rogowski immediately confesses, is convicted and imprisoned.

The notoriety of Rogowski's crime (combined with the suicides and drug charges that befall other skateboarders) briefly associates the sport with sinister, dangerous behaviour. Rogowski now regrets his crime, while skateboarding enjoys renewed worldwide popularity.

Two incompatible documentary genres are uncomfortably brought together in *Stoked The Rise and Fall of Gator*. For most of its running time, the film is a sports documentary, chronicling the early history of skateboarding through vintage footage and the biography of 1980s champion Mark 'Gator' Rogowski. In the last 20 minutes, however, it turns into a true-crime story about Rogowski's brutal rape and murder of a young woman. The

juncture between the major part – all acrobatic pool-and-ramp skateboarding, accompanied by reminiscences about the hedonistic American 1980s – and the final section, which switches to dry police testimony and blood-stained forensics, is jarring and disturbing in a way presumably not intended by director-producer Helen Stickler.

It's not that Stickler is an incapable film-maker, though this is only her second film (the first was *Andre the Giant Has a Posse*, 1997, about skate-punk iconography). The narrative unfolds in a suspenseful and gratifying way; she plants seeds throughout about Rogowski's mounting psychosis, his unresolved rage towards his father and how this fuelled first his reckless skateboarding stunts, then his criminal monstrosity. You're gripped by the handsome Rogowski's creepy personality, as documented in some very strange self-promotional home videos.

Stickler is also effective in depicting the confused identity skateboarding had in its early days, adrift somewhere between displays of athletic prowess, rock-star antics and street-smart lawlessness – all further plagued by the uncool demands of the commercial sponsors. There's a moral message here: many of the interviewees emphasise the irresponsibility of tossing huge sums of money at unguided teenage idols, only to abandon them to lonely unemployment the minute their star has fallen.

It is upsetting, none the less, that the victim of this story, Jessica Bergsten, the innocent woman tortured and murdered, has somehow become the victim of this film too. Since she was a part of neither Rogowski's nor of skateboarding's history, we are offered virtually no insight into who Bergsten was. The young woman is depicted as just a

mutilated body, an accessory for this real-life *American Psycho*. It's easy to imagine how the extremes of Rogowski's story might elicit a 'wow!-this-would-make-a-great-movie!' response, but its complexity required more imaginative, more sensitive film-making than Stickler has managed here. In following Rogowski's story alone, and hearing him speak with unpersuasive remorse, you are even seized by the awful possibility that his contrition may be just another attempt to return to the spotlight.

In its peremptory treatment, Bergsten's tragedy is reduced to being the sensational sauce for the grand finale of 'The Mark Rogowski Story'. Perhaps the idea was to express the disconnection between Rogowski and his victim, since he, like us, barely knew her. But apart from one emotional interview with the ex-girlfriend who introduced the victim to her murderer, the storytelling towards the end of *Stoked* feels sensationalist and heartless, particularly in the gruesome close-ups of the young woman's skeletal remains.

Stoked offers a kind of guilty pleasure similar to those Channel Five crime-history TV programmes which are ostensibly about World War II but which actually satisfy perverse curiosity about, say, Nazi atrocities. The formulaic skateboard-documentary style evinced here – interviews with ageing skateboard champs spliced with vintage shots of Del Mar skeeter-boys flying across empty swimming pools, as seen in 2001's *Dogtown and Z-Boys* by Stacy Peralta (also interviewed in *Stoked*) – is so predictable it now begs for a *This Is Spinal Tap*-style skateboard mockumentary. Such a film could refresh our enthusiasm for the sport – as long as they leave out the gruesome, tacked-on murder.

Gilda Williams



Close to the edge: Mark Rogowski