



Road to success hard sledding, but a fascinating challenge

By CARL HAHN
LIFE staff

When the thermometer hits -60 F, most people would be worrying about how to survive. Adventure filmmaker Becky Bristow was more worried about how her camera would perform. "My camera actually worked the whole time, surprisingly, but there's a part in the film where it starts to peter — but it comes back and it's OK."

She included the faltering camera scene in her new movie *Dog Gone Addiction*, because it brings home just how cold it was for competitors mushing a team through the Yukon Quest dogsled race. While she was worried about her camera, they were worried about running dogs for 1,600 km through the wilderness and living to tell about it.

"It was only -60 for about two days," Bristow says, noting that the week leading up to it temperatures hung somewhere in the -40s.

Shooting a dogsled race was a bit of a change of pace for Bristow. Raised in Rocky Mountain House, she has become a world-class kayaker and adventurer, and released her independently produced kayaking movie *A Russian Wave* in 2004. Unlike most adventure paddling movies, hers told the story of a frustrating time in Russia trying to map out navigable white water for a tour company, but spending more time being introduced to local culture while the guides searched for good fishing.

Filled with humour and character instead of pounding rock music and whitewater, it won several awards, including People's Choice for short films at the Whistler Film Festival and Best Independent



Michelle Phillips mashes along an open river in a scene from the DVD cover of *Dog Gone Addiction*.

Film at the Rossland Film Festival. It was selected to the Best of Banff tour from the Banff Film Festival, and played in Red Deer when the tour was in town.

Bristow hadn't even started editing that movie when she shot the footage for *Dog Gone Addiction* in February 2004. The fascinating Yukon Quest is less well known than the highly publicized American Iditarod, but Bristow says it is frequently acknowledged as being harder.

The route from Fairbanks, Alaska to Whitehorse, Yukon crosses several mountain passes, with a tremendous elevation gain. It's never been completed in less than 10 days. Bristow took her camera on course using a snowmobile, and got aerial shots from a media helicopter and rented airplanes. The two pilots she hired were training to get their licences, so they fortunately didn't cost as much, she



Becky Bristow gets shots of mushers near the end of the race, when the temperature had risen considerably above -60 F.

says with a smile.

The plan was to focus on Whitehorse competitor Michelle Phillips, a sister of one of Bristow's friends. But the more time Bristow spent interviewing the people, the broader the story got.

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She ended up with 62 hours of footage. She had to edit *A Russian Wave* first, so didn't start putting together *Dog Gone Addiction* until February 2005.

It took way longer than she expected.

The National Film Board, in addition to a \$3,000 grant, provided film editing facilities in Edmonton, so she stayed with her grandma for a year and a half to work on it. The Banff Film Festival also kicked in \$1,000, but Bristow's kayaking had to pay for the rest of it.

"I did a commercial (for Nissan) kayaking, and that's pretty much what paid for me to be able to work and not make any money," she says.

"I knew what I wanted, but when you're dealing with 62 hours of footage it's so hard to get rid of stuff and stay focused on the story you want to tell. If you have good footage you want to keep it, but if it doesn't tell the story you've got to get rid of it."

The result was a 67-minute movie focused on three women — Phillips, Polish immigrant Agata Franczak, and Alaskan Kelley Griffin — and a fair bit of interview with the winner, Hans Gatt. Tacked on is another 55 minutes of bonus features that were too important to cut, on dogs, the race, the veterinarians and more on each character.

Bristow achieved her goal of having the feature film ready for this year's



Bristow was able to get aerial shots of the Yukon Quest dogsled race by renting air time with pilots who were in training.

Yukon Quest — although Franczak died of cancer before she got to see it. Bristow toured the film around Alaska over the winter and was able to sell 1,200 copies in the process, already more than *A Russian Wave*.

So far *Dog Gone Addiction* has been accepted into Calgary International Film Festival and the Wanaka Moun-

tain Film Festival in New Zealand, where it was voted runner-up for the People's Choice award.

"I was pretty happy with that."

She's hoping it will again make the Banff Film Festival this year. A distributor is selling DVDs in Alaska for her,

but marketing in Canada and the rest of the world is up to her.

Bristow hesitates before talking about future projects — not because they're top secret, but because she isn't sure what's next. She hasn't seen much of her Revelstoke home in a couple of years and has been missing teaching kayaking.

There's some movie potential in a very inspiring woman who has lost the use of her legs but still participates in adventures sports.

"She asked me if I wanted to go surfing," Bristow laughs. "I might do a little something on her."

She would prefer just to shoot video for the next project and leave the editing to someone else, though.

Her only concrete plan is that she's going to Yellowknife this month for a dog sled symposium. It's a chance to sell more videos and see another place she hasn't yet seen. Plus the Slave River will be ideal for kayaking.

"That's as far as I've thought in the future, really."

Dog Gone Addiction is now available on DVD in Red Deer at Valhalla Pure Outfitters and Chapters, and in Rocky at the Co-op and Grand View Stage. For more information, visit www.wildsoulscreations.com

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