



CANWEST HOVERCRAFT NABS ROLE IN TURNER BROADCASTING SYSTEM MOVIE OF THE WEEK

The instructions were rather terse: "If you are interested in a part in a movie, show up with your hovercraft at the False Creek boat ramp at 8:00 AM tomorrow morning for an audition and show us what your machine can do. And so it began.

An abandoned copper mine at Britannia Beach, along the picturesque Howe Sound north of Vancouver, British Columbia, provided the backdrop for TBS Movie Of the Week - *Shadow Warriors II: Hunt For The Death Merchant*. The film starred **Terry "Hulk" Hogan** as Mike McBride, the leader of an elite team of ex-Navy SEALs, **Shannon Tweed** (Vancouver) as the film's leading actress and **Gerard Plunkett** (Vancouver) as the evil scientist Sarkissian. The film also starred **Carl Weathers**, **Martin Kove** and **Mike White**.

The climax of the movie involves Sarkissian's escape from the mine complex and McBride's pursuit of the villain at sea in Canair 506 hovercraft, piloted by **Lew Adkins** of **Canwest Hovercraft**. The filming on land in the mine complex and in the waters of Howe Sound provided a significant challenge for your not-so-intrepid hovercraft pilot. The land-based scenes proved exceptionally difficult, not to mention dangerous to the actors and equipment, and expensive in skirt segments. One scene involved blasting out of an abandoned mine workshop, executing a right-angled turn on a downhill slope after only 30 feet of travel, and exiting "stage right", but not before knocking over an expensive camera and showering the film's star with dust and gravel.

Another scene required a full power acceleration up a narrow, twisting path only 20 inches wider than the craft, with telephone poles and low concrete walls on both sides. The dust was so bad that, when reversing back down the path for a second take, and with ground guides on all four corners, we still managed to tear 18 segments off the craft when we snagged one of the low concrete walls with steel spikes along its top. So there the craft was, in the middle of a set, with explosions going off and old pickup trucks roaring around and showering gravel on our heads as we worked, with a multi segment-ectomy in progress, getting ready for the next "take".

Much of the filming was done with either Hulk Hogan (275 pounds) or his screen double (225 pounds) hanging off the starboard rear corner of the side structure. In order to achieve any sort of pitch and roll trim, we had to add sand bags for ballast, usually in the left front compartment of the side structure. To lighten the load somewhat, we removed the rear seat unit where a young stage assistant hid under a blanket with a two-way radio, issuing commands to the thoroughly-challenged pilot.



Mike McBride, played by Terry the "Hulk" Hogan, pulls the wicked Sarkissian from the cockpit during a sequence with the hovercraft rather sanely tethered to the dock. They wouldn't send the real actors out in a Small Craft Warning would they?

After thrashing around the buildings, concrete walls and telephone poles of the mine site, I was looking forward to getting back to the water. Unfortunately, the water scenes produced no less anxiety. For those of you familiar with the West Coast inlets in general, and Howe Sound in particular, you will appreciate that there is a strong on-shore flow of wind in the morning, followed by a strong out-flow in the late afternoon and early evening. As work started around 7:00 AM and often did not finish until around 9:30 PM, we were subjected to both flows during the day's shooting schedule. In May, there is generally a Small Craft Warning in the morning as the massive on-shore breeze heads up the Squamish Valley towards Whistler as the land mass heats up. The middle of the day is generally calm, then the reverse occurs as the air mass flows off the rapidly cooling land and heads out to the relatively warm ocean, where it rises and creates the vacuum which drives the force of the wind down the Sound.

As these phenomena might not be known by the Director, I thought it might be helpful if he was aware.

"Excuse me Mr. Director. Are you aware that the forecast today calls for a Small Craft Warning until well into the afternoon and the water could be pretty rough?"

"I like rough water, it makes for more excitement in the movie."

He wasn't kidding. The wind blew at 22 to 25 knots for most of the day. On top of that, a passing freighter put up a 10 foot swell, followed by an eight footer and a six footer at very short frequency on top of the already choppy water. And all of this with a 225 pound stunt double hanging off the starboard side. But the part that really got the adrenaline going was the action shot, not the one shown above, where "Hulk" grabs the villainous Sarkissian (yours truly with a brief on-screen appearance) and pulls him out of the cockpit to do battle on the side structure during the Small Craft Warning. With the engine cut to idle, a hefty three and one-half foot chop, our combined weight of well over 400 pounds on the outboard edge of our downwind side, and with the helicopter camera craft adding its downwash to all of this, the craft began to roll.

At that point, we two "combatants" looked one another in the eye, reckoned that a swim was not in the script, and executed an actor-prompted "Cut" to the scene. A quick dive back into the cockpit and restoration of some hover power stopped the roll and provided breathing space to count blessings.

Such was our introduction to the movie industry. I now have a much greater respect for the professionals on both sides of the camera. They work long and hard and produce some superb results. Meticulous attention to detail and continuity are the hallmarks of a really good film. The makeup staff even taped over my wedding ring as, who would ever marry the wicked Sarkissian anyway? I will never be able to watch a movie in quite the same way as I did before.



Speaking of attention to detail and continuity, yours truly (left) is seen with head shaved for the occasion, with star Gerard Plunkett, the real Sarkissian, safely on the dock at Britannia Beach.

Lew Adkins
Canhover Air Cushion Vehicles Inc. (formerly Canwest Hovercraft)