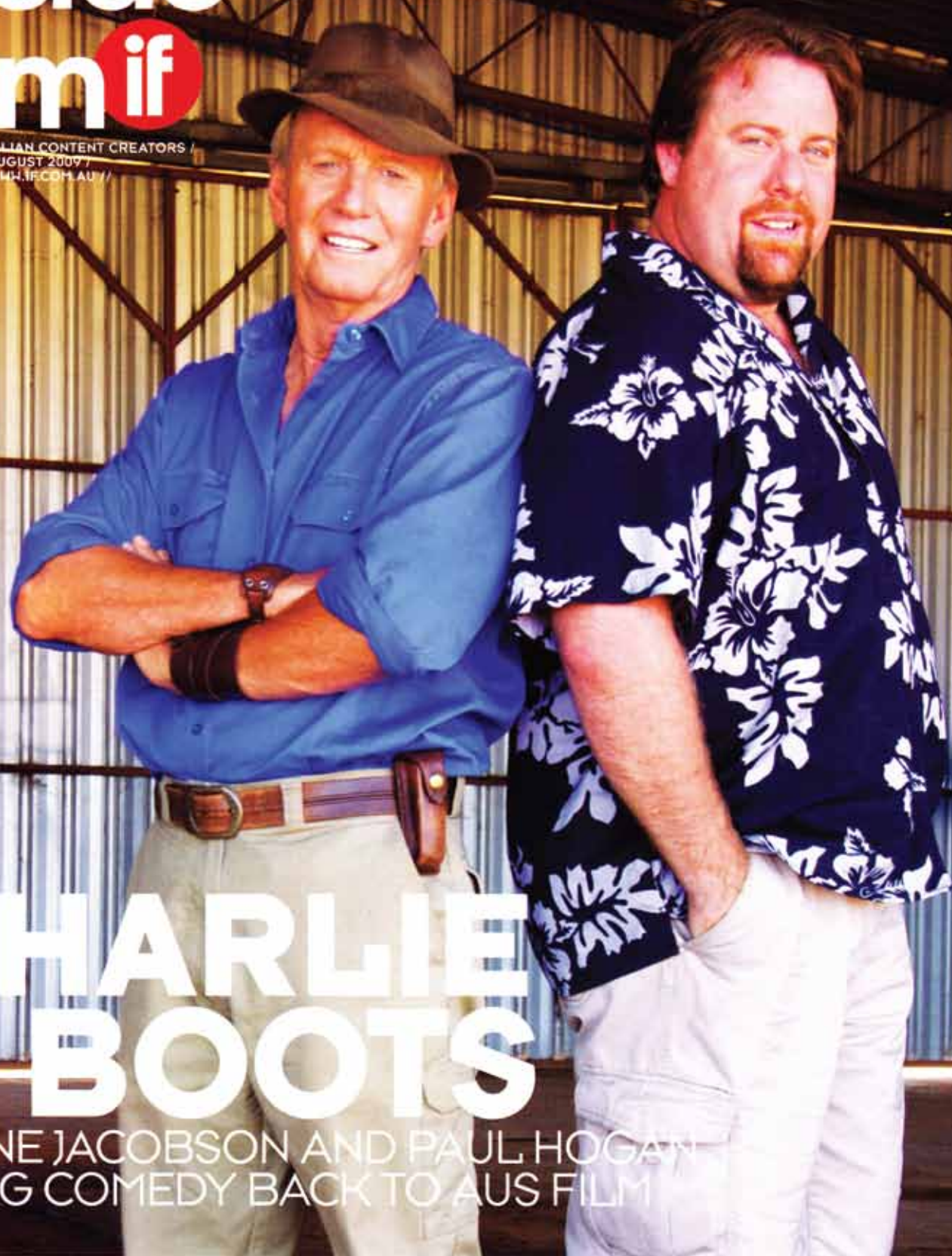


# inside film if

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## CHARLIE & BOOTS

SHANE JACOBSON AND PAUL HOGAN  
BRING COMEDY BACK TO AUS FILM

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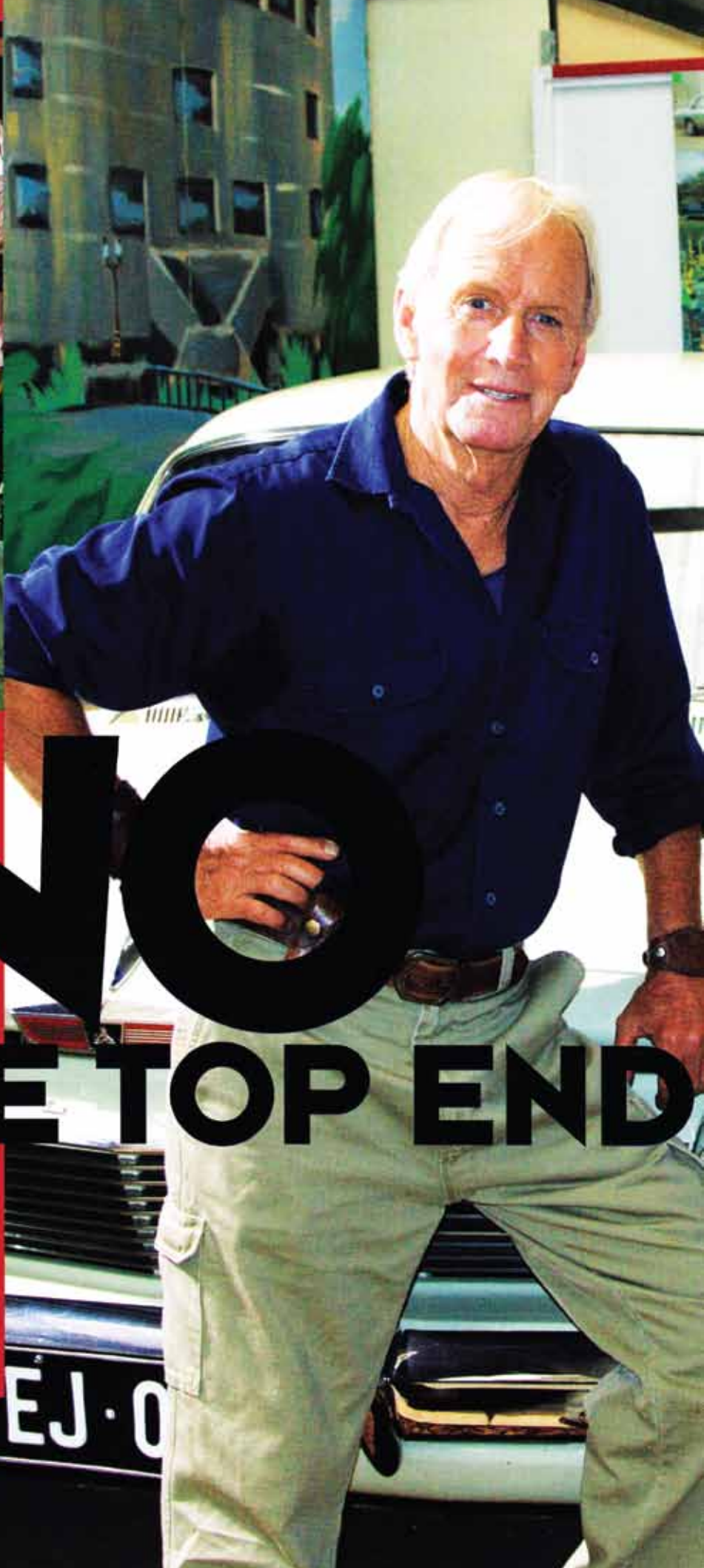
**FINANCE:** UNLOCKING THE IN-FLIGHT SALES CHANNEL



SHANE JACOBSON AND DIRECTOR



SHANE JACOBSON AND PAUL HOGAN



COVER STORY

# TWO IN THE TOP END

SHANE JACOBSON AND PAUL HOGAN PLAY A FATHER AND SON TRAVELLING TO THE NORTHERN MOST TIP OF AUSTRALIA FOR A SPOT OF FISHING IN *CHARLIE & BOOTS*. BRENDAN SWIFT FINDS OUT HOW THE TWO COMEDY ICONS WERE PUT TOGETHER BY A BIG STUDIO AND A LOCAL PRODUCTION HOUSE.



IT WAS WHILE filming in one of the many country towns that dot the eastern seaboard that Hoges saw her approaching. The elderly woman pointed her walking stick about a foot from his chest and announced in a loud voice: "There's Paul Hogan".

His retort – to look around and ask "Where?" – remains a mark of the larrikin that brought Australia to the world through a series of landmark commercials, TV shows and films. It counted for little. She simply hit him with her walking stick and told him: "Right there, in the chair".

It may be almost 25 years since *Crocodile Dundee* became the biggest movie in the world, but Paul Hogan remains an icon. And *Charlie & Boots* teams him with another icon in Shane Jacobson – who shot to fame in 2004 as toilet plumber Kenny – in a heartfelt father-son road movie.

Boots (Jacobson), concerned that his father Charlie (Hogan) is struggling to come to terms with the death of his wife, takes his initially reticent dad on a road trip from regional Victoria to Cape York Peninsula, where they plan to fulfil a lifelong goal to go fishing.

"When we put them together they just clicked – it was just obvious," co-producer David Redman says.

And, for the most part, the film strikes the right note between sweet-natured comedy and drama. It strategically veers away from the tough art-house dramas that have characterised the local industry and stranded it within a morass of insular topics such as drug addiction and myriad forms of self-abuse in recent years.

The feel-good *Kenny* was the biggest Australian hit of 2006, grossing \$7.78 million at the local box office. The producers behind *Charlie & Boots*, Instinct Entertainment, also backed Hogan's last outing – *Strange Bedfellows* – which grossed \$4.82 million and was the biggest local movie of 2004.

"With *Strange Bedfellows* we kind of identified a potential audience that we didn't really feel were being catered to by other Australian films," Redman says. "They responded really well. We always felt that that was an audience worth going after again."

The concept was conceived just over 18 months ago when writer and director Dean Murphy had dinner with Jacobson and his manager Deb Fryers. During the course of the evening, Murphy asked Jacobson whom he would most

like to work with. Hogan – one of Jacobson's comic heroes – immediately stood out.

"He's an incredibly funny guy who has spent a bit of time on Earth and has lived a bit of life," Jacobson says. "A guy that is ever ready to be kind ... who just happens to be one of the most successful entertainers ever."

Instinct then joined forces with distributor Paramount Pictures Australia (alongside partner Transmission) and quickly moulded the film into a vehicle aimed squarely at mainstream audiences aged 35 and above. A key date was immediately slated for release to bolster the film's family-oriented themes: Father's Day 2009.

The film relies on a strong cast of quintessential Australian actors to flesh out its portrait of regional Australia, which will form a key part of the marketing push. Actors such as Roy Billing (*Underbelly 2*), Val Lehman (*Prisoner*) and Diane Smith (*A Country Practice*), as well as locals in the various regional towns, make appearances along the journey.

The portrait of the many lolling small towns in regional Australia stands in stark contrast to the process needed to capture them. It took a cast and crew of more than 70, travelling in 30 vehicles over 7 weeks last November, across more than 3,000 kilometres, according to co-producer Shana Levine.

"There were many places we hadn't 'recced' because they were so far and turning up with a crew of 70 plus and finding enough local accommodation near the locations, given the tight shooting schedule, kept everyone on their toes," she says.

"As well as the distances we also had the harsh climate to deal with. One morning we were shooting in Tamworth, we woke up, looked outside our hotel and it was sunny and the lawns were green. That night we struggled to get all the trucks and equipment out as the deluge began. The next morning, we were quickly packing our bags as we watched the water level rise outside our hotel window as there'd been six metres of rain overnight and the place was flooded and many roads closed."

As with Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*, the film uses the Australian countryside to bring its characters and story to the fore. Director Dean Murphy and

co-writer Stewart Faichney conducted their own road trip along the coast to scout for locations prior to the shoot.

"We wanted to show the colour palate of Australia," he says. "In Warrnambool, the way it changes from yellows, reds and browns and all different colours and the lushness of far north Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef."

Murphy and Faichney also worked together on *Strange Bedfellows* and their most recent collaboration shares much in common with its predecessor, which also paired Hogan with another Australian icon, Michael Caton, from *The Castle*.

Comedies, and other feel good movies, make up a majority of Australia's all-time box office hits although not all have succeeded in recent years. (The weaker scripts that underpinned two of Redman's other production forays – *Take Away* (in 2003) and *You and Your Stupid Mate* (in 2005) – saw them fail to gain a widespread audience.)

"I think people forget how many people go to the cinema for escapism, and escapism is frowned upon," Murphy says.

While most Australian films flounder when it comes to the crucial marketing stage, the involvement of Paramount is likely to see a far broader campaign than most recent local fare.

While details were still being

finalised at the time of press, the release is likely to stretch to well over 100 screens and also encompass mainstream strategies such as TV advertisements. A large-scale promotional tour by Jacobson and Hogan will also test whether Hogan's recent stoush with the government, which is continuing to investigate his use of offshore tax havens, effects audiences.

"This was an [Australian] film that was developed completely outside the normal funding system – it was financed by a studio," Redman says. "That's not going to apply across very many production companies."

While the production budget has not been released, the filmmakers say *Charlie & Boots* cost slightly more than *Strange Bedfellows*, which received almost \$4 million in government funding.

The film is also a sign of Paramount's commitment to the local market, since its local arm was formed in early-2007 after the break-up of United International Pictures. The company, in partnership with Transmission (founded by ex-Dendy bosses' Andrew Mackie and Richard Payten) has an explicit aim to co-finance and acquire local and international projects for the Australian and New Zealand markets.

"This is not a film where we release in the art-house specialty sector; we wanted the mainstream

public." Paramount Pictures Australia managing director Mike Selwyn says. "This has a budget that allows all the media we would use for a regular Hollywood film."

Its US parent, Paramount Pictures, also co-produced Hogan's *Crocodile Dundee II* in the late-80s, although Selwyn says *Charlie & Boots'* laconic Australian humour is squarely aimed at local audiences rather than overseas. Paramount is also backing several other notable local films in development such as *Wog Boy 2*; *Kings of Mykonos*, *Beneath Hill 60* (both with Transmission) and *Tomorrow When the War Began*.

"With Australian product, we sense there's so much talent there, the market is about to rebound in a big way," Selwyn says.

Redman says studios are looking for good material that will reach audiences. "First and foremost, they have to be made for an audience, and they've got to be made at a level that is appropriate for that potential audience, whether it's big small or in the middle," he says.

"It really comes down to correctly identifying the scale of your audience and making a film that works in that way. Tying those links more tightly between development and distribution is really critical."

*Charlie & Boots* opens at cinemas on September 3. Check out the trailer at the [INSIDEFILM](#) website. **O**

## Laughing all the way to the box office

More than half of the biggest Australian movies of all time are comedies or family-oriented

Rank	Title	Genre	Release date	Box office (\$m)	Distributor
1	Crocodile Dundee	Comedy	1986	47.71	Hoyts
2	Australia	Epic	2008	37.29	Fox
3	Babe	Family	1995	36.78	UIP/Universal
4	Happy Feet	Animated	2006	31.79	Roadshow
5	Moulin Rouge	Musical	2001	27.72	Fox
6	Crocodile Dundee II	Comedy	1988	24.92	Hoyts
7	Strictly Ballroom	Comedy	1992	21.76	Ronin
8	The Dish	Comedy	2000	18.00	Roadshow
9	The Man from Snowy River	Family	1982	17.23	Hoyts
10	The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert	Comedy	1994	16.46	Roadshow