

LOCAL FOCUS

# STONE RIDES AGAIN

In 1974, director SANDY HARBUTT made local cinema history with his tough-as-nails bikie classic *STONE*. Now filmmaker RICHARD CARTWRIGHT is set to give it the remake treatment, with Mr. Harbutt's blessing.  
BY GEOFF STANTON



**W**hen Sandy Harbutt's biker classic *Stone* rumbled through cinemas in 1974, few would have thought the trail would still be smoking in 2010. But *Stone's* five-gallon metamorphose of counterculture, violence and motorcycles remains as pioneering as ever. Filmmaker Richard Cartwright can easily attest to this – he is in fact preparing to “take the trip” again. But when he begins shooting his reworking of the iconic Aussie flick, it will be for a new generation and in 3-D. “I’m actually using the word recreation or reinvention,” he enthuses. “There are some pieces of art that you just don’t touch. I’ll refer to Mr. Quentin Tarantino’s line: ‘*Stone* is just too good to remake.’ This will be more of a homage.”

The original *Stone* galvanised a worldwide fan base, spawned motorcycle clubs such as The Vietnam Veterans (who now proudly wear the actual Grave Diggers crest featured in the film across their backs), and horrified the critics. The world has obviously turned since 1974, but *Stone's* message remains just as relevant. Developing the material for the 21st century has been a challenging but highly exciting prospect. “The bike clubs of 1974 are not quite what they are today,” concedes Cartwright. “There’s an element of looking at the biker legacy. I’ll also be bringing back into the script some of the original characters from 1974. The Undertaker will be reprised, as well as a couple of the other characters from the original gang. They’ll be older versions who ride into town and say, ‘Hey, what the hell’s going on here?’”

Cartwright’s approach is not so different from Harbutt’s vision, which is fortunate, as *Stone's* creator remains unwaveringly loyal to his inspirations. “You have to have a dynamic subject to make a movie in Australia that anybody is going to see,” says Harbutt. “I was a motorcyclist, and I had a real interest in these people. I thought the ideal outlaw motorcycle gang would be a group of returned Vietnam veterans who had every reason to reject the current corrupt society. There was a lot of reason to be angry. In fact, when I was raising the money for the film,

I actually had to lie – until I got the money, the gang was called The Grave Robbers rather than The Grave Diggers, simply because it was just so controversial. And the people who had the money were The Establishment.”

Also reflecting Harbutt’s original film, Cartwright is intent on balancing the action and drama with an emotional core. “The genres of the films that we’re trying to target are films like *The Departed*, *The Fast And The Furious* and the *Bourne* franchise.” He would also like to see legitimate involvement from various biker clubs. “I want reality and integrity. When you’re writing a story about a cultural situation, you need to make it real, otherwise you’re a phony.”

It’s no secret that Quentin Tarantino is a big fan of *Stone*. Cartwright and QT shared their enthusiasm at The

Cannes Film Festival, where Cartwright was lucky enough to gain an audience with the director. “His exact words to me were: ‘Sandy Harbutt is a visionary!’” Cartwright meanwhile gave Tarantino an original 35mm print from Harbutt’s own collection. “Tarantino’s face was like a five-year-old kid in a candy store! The film was in an authentic 1974 can, slightly rusted, with Goulburn Theatre and Darwin Cinema stamps all over it.” The possibility remains open that Tarantino may play a role in proceedings.

Most importantly, however, is that Harbutt has given the project his blessing.

“Sandy has not imposed his point of view at any time,” Cartwright says. “He’s made wonderful and helpful suggestions. Sandy said to me, ‘Richard, I’ve made my film – now go and make your film.’ That was a wonderful thing to say, and I couldn’t be more humble. It’s now my goal to do justice to Sandy’s great piece of iconic Australian cinema.”

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**Richard Cartwright is offering the public the chance to invest in his remake of *Stone* and share in its returns. Those interested can visit [www.assob.com.au/fto](http://www.assob.com.au/fto).** ■