

2004 Panel - The Back of Beyond Collection

On July 24th 1954 at the Marree Town Hall, the multi award winning classic Australian film ***The Back of Beyond*** was screened for the first time in outback Australia. Fifty years later to the day, a double DVD of the four major film and television stories about legendary outback mailman **E.G. (Tom) Kruse MBE** was launched to commemorate this historic screening.

Tom and Valma Kruse, other cast members and members from the **Butler, Ding** and **Heyer** families including **Dr Elizabeth Heyer**, daughter of *The Back of Beyond's* Director John Heyer, attended along with mates **Monty Scobie** and **George Bell**. Tom and Valma were flown to Marree by the RFDS in a PC12.

The fully restored 1936 ***The Back of Beyond*** Leyland Badger and 'Henry', the replica ***The Back of Beyond*** Blitz truck (named after Tom's mail run travelling companion **Henry Butler**) were in Marree for the celebratory weekend. It was a memorable celebration; a significant tribute to Tom in his 90th year and the town was right behind the event. Tom had taken a tumble in his garden in Adelaide the previous day and looked a little bruised and battered – but in good spirits.

Tom Kruse was a film star before his ***Top Gun*** Hollywood namesake **Tom Cruise** was born. The 1954 Australian film classic *The Back of Beyond* introduced **Tom Kruse** and his 1936 Leyland Badger mail truck to a generation of Australians. Most never forgot the extraordinary images of the man and his battered trucks doing battle each fortnight with the sand and isolation along the Birdsville Track - outback Australia's toughest mail run.

The Back of Beyond remains one of the most critically acclaimed and awarded films ever produced in Australia. It won Best Film at the Venice Film Festival in 1954, as well as many other international awards. The impressive 1954 Venice Film Festival trophy, loaned by the **Shell Company of Australia**, was on display.

The 50-year tribute double DVD ***The Back of Beyond Collection*** includes ***The Back of Beyond*** (Film Australia 1954), ***The Outback Mailmen*** (ABC Countrywide 1986), ***The Postman*** (ABC TV Australian Story 1996) and ***Last Mail From Birdsville – the Story of Tom Kruse*** (Corrugated Air Productions 1999).

The project involved **Film Australia, ABC TV, the RFDS, the CMV Foundation** and **Corrugated Air Productions**. Tom Kruse was awarded an MBE by **Queen Elizabeth** in 1955 for 'Services to the people of the Outback'.

The main street in Marree was closed from 12 noon for the official opening by ABC Radio's **Colin Munro**, followed by a community BBQ in front of the Marree Hotel. The screenings at the Marree Community Hall started at 6.30 pm. Funds raised from the BBQ and recovery breakfast, the film evening and the sale of the DVD were in support of the Marree Hospital and the RFDS.

Photo credits: Digger Campbell, Mark Brake, Irene Zada & Keith Webb