

# Concepts, Cash-Flow and Outbacks

## ALBE FALZON REFLECTS ON TRACKS' HUMBLE BEGINNINGS.

Albe Falzon has spent his whole life following a muse. Along the way he has made surfing's most celebrated film 'Morning of the Earth', traipsed through the tropics to stumble upon Uluwatu, and filmed George Greenough for a year while the eccentric Californian built his boat, 'The Crystal Voyager' (later a film by the same title). And that's only scratching the surface when it comes to Albe's artistic legacy.

When making decisions, Albe has always followed his passions; figuring the economics could be worked out later. This kind of bold, creative logic was at play 50 years ago when he was a co-conspirator, alongside David Elfick and John Witzig, in a magazine concept dubbed Tracks. Below, Albe talks about some of the defining moments from the magazine's nascent period.

### CONCEPTS AND CASH

I'm actually really surprised that it came out at all because we had absolutely zero money. We had a great idea but no funding.

We wanted to put this newspaper out that was going to be contemporary...that would contribute to the movement at the time, which was quite powerful because there was a war going on, which we were conscripted for, and there was a moratorium on the whales because they were shooting whales and killing whales at the time. There

was a political movement there, there was all this new music coming in, there was an alternative movement that was developing, not only in Australia, but in America, and we were getting the offshoot of that here... there was also a great movement to country-soul-living and getting back to the roots of surfing and being free to be able to express your life in whatever way you wanted, and a mood surfaced where people just kind of resonated with that.

I think the newspaper was timely because it supported that concept. Tracks became a voice for not only the surfing community, but for an alternative community that was focused on the environment, on politics, on good living on music, etc. We covered a lot of territories in that magazine. I think that the other magazines were pretty straightforward and hard-core surfing. But what we did with the newspaper is we broadened it. It was a broadsheet and a platform.

When we were producing it we had the concept. But we didn't have anything beyond that; we didn't have the finances or the resources, but we had a connection and a great idea. So we put our energies together - John Witzig David Elfick and myself - and we got it to the point where we could actually get it into production. We had enough money just to get it into production, but we didn't have enough money to pay for the plate making and the printing ... it was crazy, we went to about half a dozen people

with no luck at all. At the last-minute Robert Matthews came in and said, "I'll pick up the printing bill", and that was like a godsend because it was our biggest expense.

Consolidated Press, then under Frank Packer, agreed to distribute the newspaper. That was a really key thing for us, because once it was on all the newsstands around Australia it took off.

### THE CREATIVE HUB

We rented this place on the southern side of Whale Beach. It was just phenomenal because you could throw a stone and hit the water; it was like 35 bucks a week. But what we did, we set up this house and it had like a granny flat underneath it.

At one point, 'Tracks', 'Surfing World', 'Morning of the Earth', and I think one of Bob Evans films were all coming out at the same house in Whale Beach.

When we first started we put the 'Tracks' office downstairs, which was great because you walked outside and there was a little garden and you're looking at the ocean. You could almost jump off the edge of the cliff and paddle across to the Wedge if you wanted to, which was fantastic. And that's where we published the first issues of Tracks.

**Top Left:** David Elfick (left of frame) and Albe Falzon were collaborators on both Tracks and 'Morning of The Earth'.

**Top Right:** John Witzig enjoying the view from the window at the Whale Beach house.

**Bottom:** The Whale Beach house that served as a creative hub for various arms of the surf media in the early 70s.

“... It wasn't like phoning up Michael and saying, “I will meet you down there; let's do some work together.” It was one of those situations where Kirra was just firing and we just happened to be there ...”

Well, upstairs was my living area. And at the time, Frank Pithers was working on Tracks magazine as a gopher and photographer and advertising guy, and he had a room upstairs. He was putting 'Surfing World' together in the room upstairs. So 'Surfing World' was being produced in the room above Tracks.

I was also filming 'Morning of the Earth'. I'd be working on Tracks downstairs, then, when the issue was done, we'd bail up the coast to capture footage. Upstairs had this garage and there was a room under the garage so it was kind of a three-layered place. So, I was cutting 'Morning of the Earth' underneath the garage upstairs.

When you think about what was actually going out in the surfing arena at that time, I think that was a real sort of focal point because 'Surfing World' and Tracks were the two predominant surfing magazines in Australia and 'Morning of the Earth' came out and went like a bomb. So that was a really important time, the confluence of energies that came together unbeknownst to us just happened, it just evolved naturally it wasn't something we planned but that was, I think, a really interesting point in surfing history - a real nucleus.

#### THE ICONIC MP CUTBACK (TRACKS COVER FEB 1972)

We were just sort of winging it everywhere we went, you know, it was one of those things where you were just on a kind of road trip. And wherever we went on the road trip, that's where we ended up.

We were always following the weather patterns. You know, as soon as the cyclones hit up there, I'd be itching to get out the door and head to Queensland. We were drawn up there like everyone is in those cyclone periods and there seemed to be a lot more cyclone activity in those early periods than there is now.

Because there were all those great points and a contingent of really good surfers, we'd just got up there. And that's how I stumbled into Michael. It wasn't like phoning up Michael and saying, "I will meet you down there; let's do some work together." It was one of those situations where Kirra was just firing and we just happened to be there.

We'd always go to Kirra or Greenmount, or Burleigh... So it just so happened that we went to Kirra and Michael was out there, but the thing that's interesting about it is I can't remember that wave specifically; because there were so many good waves in that whole window of opportunity that surfaced. And that happened to be one wave in that window.

It's only when I was editing the film - because when you're shooting it's 25 frames a second with movie. If you watch the movie, it's hardly noticeable but when you're editing - as I was doing - I'm looking and cutting frame by frame to match images. So I'm looking at slowing the film down and just going through it really carefully, not only for technical reasons and for editing purposes, but because I'm fascinated that those moments that you don't see with the eye when you're just looking, standing on the

beach or looking through a camera, because it's going through so quick, and everything's happening so fast that you don't notice it. But when you actually pull the film back and look at it, and see each 25 images in each second, you get to see a really good part of that performance or that wave or whatever. And that's when I saw the cut back - then I went through and I rocked and rolled the film until I got to those three or four shots and I just went faaark! That is such a good shot. But if you look at in the movie, you don't see it. When you pull the shot out, you freeze that frame. That's how I got it.

I think in today's world, 4K digital raises the frame grabs and delivers fantastic detail in them. But then the thing that I like about that shot, it doesn't have that digital look, it's got film quality, it's got grain. Digital is fantastic for me, but it's just a bit too sharp. You know, in my general photography, I like to see softness, a bit of movement through it. And I think that shot freezes it, but it's got motion, and you know, I think that's a really appealing aspect of that photo... It just captures a moment and the time.

You know, I mean, there's so many, so many good surfers out there doing so many extraordinary things. But it's all passing. That's all in passing, you know. In another five years it will be something else. But that photo really captured that time, just like Tracks did during those few years when it was going through this radical change, and people were looking for a direction on, you know, a different lifestyle.

Top: The immortalised Michael Peterson frame that featured in 'Morning of the Earth', and also graced the Feb. 1972 cover of Tracks. Photo: Falzon

Bottom: MP tucks a board under his wing and twists a lip for the camera. John 'Kipper' Standing seated beside him in the broad-brimmed hat.