

Transcript for:

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH KEN BLOCK,
PROFESSIONAL RALLY DRIVER, HOONIGAN RACING**

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Hoonigan Racing
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Interviewers:
Matt Anderson, Curator of Transportation, The Henry Ford

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TIME IN	COMMENT
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00:05	<p>Matt Anderson</p> <p>My name is Matt Anderson, Curator of Transportation at The Henry Ford. Today is November 12th, 2019. We are with Ken Block in his uh, shop out of Park City, Utah. Thank you very much for making the time for us today and uh, we'll start with just a few uh, warm-up questions to kind of get things going. First of all, what's your favorite kind of music?</p>
00:25	<p>Ken Block</p> <p>Wow, uh, starting off light, huh? [laughter] Uh well I grew up in the '80s, so I grew up listening to punk rock and new wave, so the current version of that would be called alternative rock, but I also grew up loving hip hop and rap, so I still listen to that too, not as much though.</p>
00:47	<p>Matt Anderson</p> <p>Do you have a favorite movie?</p>
00:50	<p>Ken Block</p> <p>Another tough one, jeez! Uh, it used to be <i>Blazing Saddles</i>, but that isn't as PC anymore. So uh, I don't know. Something odd I guess comes to mind something like <i>Fight Club</i>. Yeah something like that.</p>
01:11	<p>Matt Anderson</p> <p>On a related note, do you know a favorite racing movie?</p>
01:14	<p>Ken Block</p> <p>Uh, actually no. Uh, Actually, I really enjoyed the <i>Senna</i> movie, and there's a bunch of stuff I've watched from Duke video from England you know, Rally type stuff over the years, and I really enjoy that stuff, but there isn't one that particularly stands out. But the movies about Senna really stands out in my mind because it really captures a particular uh, timeframe of racing that was really unique you know, and there's another one I guess. It's called um, <i>Too Fast to Race</i> which is about- it's about the history of Rally but particularly about the Group B era which was like the Formula One cars but for Rally, but they ended up being too fast. Drivers started dying, and spectators started dying, and they're like, "Ok, we need to stop this." So that era ended in '86. So that, <i>Too Fast to Race</i> is a good documentary about that.</p>

02:12	<p>Matt Anderson Sounds like your taste is more towards documentaries than fiction.</p>
02:17	<p>Ken Block Yeah, I mean the cool thing about racing is that there's so many great stories in it that you don't need fiction to tell that story, you know? And uh yeah you know, guys like Senna or Colin McRae are unique characters in life and really make motorsport what it is.</p>
02:40	<p>Matt Anderson Perfect! Well with that done, maybe those were the hard questions. We'll move on to just some general background questions. I wonder if you could just tell us a little about your background, where you were born, where you grew up, describe your family experiences.</p>
02:53	<p>Ken Block Uh, I was born in Long Beach, California. Uh, my dad had his own business that had to do with the printed circuit board industry, so I grew up going to Dodgers games, um, skateboarding, riding BMX bikes. I tried a lot of uh, you know, team sports but ended up liking more individual type sports and so I ended up being a skateboarder and later on racing motocross just at an amateur level and eventually later snowboarding.</p>
03:24	<p>Ken Block Uh, so I- born in Long Beach. Eventually, my parents decided they wanted to own an avocado grove, so they bought a small avocado grove down near Escondido, California, so I went to high school in Escondido. That ended up being a very big impact on my life because I grew up around uh, what ended up being a lot of professional skateboarders and snowboarders and surfers, guys that I ended up knowing still, uh, today in this part of my life uh, so I, you know, eventually lived in Carlsbad, California, and Encinitas and that's where I eventually started DC Shoes with my business partner, Damon Way.</p>
04:06	<p>Matt Anderson Perfect, well, so, you grew up obviously in the heart of Southern California skate culture, so I was wondering if you could just describe what it was like at the time you</p>

	were growing up because it seems like it was really on the rise.
04:18	Ken Block Yeah, I mean I grew up really as an '80s kid, so you know, skateboarding, snowboarding, and punk rock music and sort of that rebellious you know anti-establishment style of sports, and art, and music and all that. Uh, so it really kind of shaped how I thought about the world, how I looked at art, how I wanted to kind of be a creative person uh, as opposed to just, you know, inside a team somewhere.
04:45	I wanted to, kind of, do things my own way and create my own path. Uh, so you know, I was lucky enough to grow up in an area where several of the skate and snowboard and surf magazines were, a lot of pros lived, and so I got to live and understand that industry from uh, a young teenage age and eventually, I went out and tried to become a, you know, a good snowboarder, lived in Breckenridge, Colorado, for a couple years. But, after riding with some of my pro friends I quickly realized I wasn't good enough to be a pro, but I loved the industry so much that when I moved back to southern California, I eventually went to school for graphic arts and design and uh, you know, just the creative world that revolves around, uh, you know, computer graphics so uh, eventually started some businesses with a good friend named Damon Way, and eventually that grew into be what DC Shoes was.
05:50	Matt Anderson That uh, graphic design kind of gets into my next question. You start by your shirt printing business if I'm not mistaken, and I wondered how you um, kind of came up with that idea when you realized that there's a real opportunity here to do this.
06:02	Ken Block Yeah, well this was early '90s, and you know, there was a lot of small brands in the skateboard and snowboard world and I had a lot of friends in that industry, so I actually started printing T-shirts for some of my friends that owned skate shops and snowboard shops at a junior college uh, and I just really enjoyed that! And, uh, and I was inspired by some other friends that had small brands,

	so I decided I wanted to go that route and try and create my own brand uh, so myself and my business partner Damon Way, we, uh, designed and developed several different brands just experimenting and learning along the way.
06:47	Ken Block We were just young entrepreneurs. Uh, and we did everything from skate brands to snowboard brands. Uh, we even did a snowboard magazine at one time called <i>Blunt</i> . We were part of a snowboard company. Uh, and eventually we had DC Shoes started, and that just took off and grew so fast that we sold or got rid of everything else and just focused on DC.
07:12	Matt Anderson Well, you founded DC, in 1994. You mentioned, it took off so quickly. I wondered if you had goals for the company at the time you and Damon Way founded it, if you wanted it to be something more than just a business out to make money, if there was some kind of a mission behind it if that makes sense, and for that matter what you did about it to set yourself apart from other brands.
07:30	Ken Block Well, I think at a young age like that, I was in my early 20s, you know the goal was just to be successful and what- what bar or what level we gaged that success at uh, was really questionable. We didn't really know. You know, uh, we just wanted to have a good business that thrived and something that we could take pride in, and it really grew way beyond what we ever imagined. Uh, and, so for us, it was a great, creative outlet. It was a great way to kind of expand what we knew and had in business and for us, it was just really cool to go have a global brand that we had celebrities calling us that wanted products so you know, it went way beyond any expectation that we ever had for it.
08:24	Matt Anderson Well, I'm curious in working in a business that I think a large part of the market probably teenagers and young people, and they're notoriously fickle, so how do you stay on top of the current trends? How do you keep up with them, with what they want?
08:38	Ken Block

	<p>Uh, you know, I, I think that one of the keys to a successful business is having founders that live the lifestyle and wanna experience the lifestyle and want the product for themselves. Uh, you know, and I would say that it kind of worked in every way, shape, and form for us on the creative side, not on the business side because we didn't really know what we were doing. But on the creative side, you know, both Damon and I weren't clothing designers. We weren't footwear designers.</p>
09:08	<p>We weren't marketing people. We educated ourselves on these things, but we educated ourselves on what we liked and mimicked what other people were successful at and just grew and learned from that. We always looked at every day as a new learning experience and wanted to grow the brand and really uh you know, be something that our peers would want to own also, so I think that we were just really good at- at understanding the market and ourselves being a part of the market and just trying to make the best products that could, and that really even goes for marketing, too.</p>
09:47	<p>I mean I'd never studied marketing in my life but I eventually grew a brand, to quite a large size, based around the marketing that we were able to develop and eventually earning a bunch of awards based on what we did, so it was kind of cool to come from sort of nowhere and learn these things and then take them beyond what we thought was possible. So, I think back in those days, you know the '90s, it was kind of, you know, the Jordan era, you know? It was these big athletes that really stood out, and we basically mimicked that and did it in skateboarding and snowboarding and had a lot of fun and a lot of success with it.</p>
10:28	<p>Matt Anderson Well, I've read that you and Damon both were involved in just about every aspect of the business, so I wondered if that was out of necessity or if you really enjoyed some parts of it more than others?</p>
10:36	<p>Ken Block Well, we were involved in a lot of the creative sides of things. We hired smart people to do the business sides of things. Uh, neither one of us had much experience in that, and we knew it. So, we knew what we were good at</p>

	<p>which was much more the creative side and so we really tried to surround ourselves with smart people to grow the business. So, I, I, I credit that as both you know, uh, an attribute that both Damon and I really kind of excelled at which was saying, "Hey, we suck at this! Let's bring in smart people to help make that happen so we can all grow and be successful as a group!"</p>
11:16	<p>Matt Anderson Kind of knowing your limitations and where to let others take over in some respect?</p>
11:21	<p>Ken Block Yeah, and a lot of businesses fail because too many people don't know how to delegate or too many people try to take too much upon themselves and it can really choke a company, and we were kind of the opposite. We said, "Let's manage by consensus. Let's all work together as a group to try and make the best thing possible." Of course you still need some more leaders there to kind of say "yes" or "no" to a lot of things, but we really- we took opinions from you know, employees to, you know, the pros we worked with and tried to put it all together to make the best product, to make the best company to really make the best output that we possibly could.</p>
12:05	<p>Matt Anderson Fantastic! Well, one last question on DC of course you sell the company in 2004, and I wonder if there was a specific reason for that at the time, or if it was just time to move onto something else or you wanted a new challenge?</p>
12:16	<p>Ken Block Uh you know the- the sale of DC really uh, it has to do with a lot of things. It has to do with uh, a business partner that we had to get out of the company, has to do with uh, sort of business fatigue, [laughter], has to do with, uh, you know, kind of, both Damon and I getting married and kind of getting, moving on with our lives, so there was a lot to it. We really enjoyed DC. We kept working there for years after.</p>
12:44	<p>Ken Block I'm still involved now 15 years later at a much more minimal degree, but it's something that like, is a part of me and a big part of my life, and it's hard to, hard to ever let go but at the same point too every business is risky.</p>

	<p>It's, it's, sometimes having the success that we had, it's kind of like winning the lottery, and you've got to be appreciative of that and it's a lot of hard work but at the same time we take our successes and really be proud of that but also try and you know, move on at the same time.</p>
13:21	<p>Matt Anderson We'll move into the Rally questions if that sounds fine. We'll get into the fun stuff here. First of all, I guess I guess I should just ask about your early experiences in motorsport. As a child, did you follow any particular drivers or any racing series?</p>
13:33	<p>Ken Block Um, as a kid in the '80s, I for whatever reason I knew of Rally and I knew of it, the only reason I can think I knew of it really, was because of magazines. I enjoyed industrial design, and most of that industrial design really focused around cars because that's an easy thing to pick up a magazine in a convenience store and look at, so I always looked at car magazines.</p>
14:02	<p>Ken Block In the early and mid '80s, you had a certain car company making all wheel drive cars that were really having a lot of success in Rally, so those cars were getting a lot of exposure in I think the US magazine, so that was really my first exposure of Rally, and from there I just kind of followed that up. Any sort of programs that would come on TV like <i>ABC's Wide World of Sports</i> covering Pike's Peak, you know, 'cause the mid '80s and late '80s, the all-wheel drive Rally cars were coming over from Europe and racing and winning on Pike's Peak, so that sort of thing had coverage on some TV programs and in the magazines, so really all that was kind of my exposure to motorsports.</p>
14:48	<p>Ken Block I knew of it and understood American motorsports and my brother did some amateur drag racing, but I just wasn't that interested in it. Like, I, from 12 years on, 12 years old on, I enjoyed riding and racing dirt bikes so for me, Rally was kind of a version of that. That was the car version of racing that sort of way. They were the cars that</p>

	<p>slid and jumped and went through snow and all sorts of different conditions and that's what really just appealed to me. It was that aggressive nature of how I rode a dirt bike but translated into a car. So, ever since I can remember I, I liked Rally, I wanted to do Rally, and when I got my own keys to do my own cars I lived on a twisty, windy road uh out in the middle of nowhere, and that was the driving style that I mimicked.</p>
15:47	<p>Ken Block I wanted my cars to, you know, slide in the dirt. I wanted to, you know, there was a white line down the road. Well, I was driving like the Rally drivers, you know, using a racing line down the twisty road as opposed to staying in my lane, of course safely whenever I could.</p>
16:02	<p>Ken Block Um, so you know as the '90s came around and Rally had a bit more exposure and Colin McRae won his championship in the mid '90s, you know, those sort of things kept my interest in Rally the whole time uh, but I just never thought it was something that existed in the states whatsoever so I thought, "Okay, that's a European thing. I'll never be able to get to do that," and it wasn't until Travis Pastrana did some rallies in the States in 2004 that I realized there was even a Rally championship in America. I had no exposure to that fact whatsoever before that, so that's when I finally, said, "Wow, I can actually maybe go do this somewhere here! I don't need to go to Europe to try and figure this out?" And so that sparked an even bigger interest to finally go do it.</p>
16:57	<p>Matt Anderson It's interesting. You did it at a stage in life maybe a little later than a lot of people get into it, and I wonder if you thought that was an advantage, if that brought some kind of maturity to a way you approach the sport or your driving?</p>
17:12	<p>Ken Block Um, you know the thing about my age was I did I never thought I would go very far. It was just a hobby for me, it was just an interest, you know? We had sold DC and Travis Pastrana was one of our athletes so we started making product around him going around and racing in Rally, and I just went along in 2005 uh, with him to go</p>

	<p>out to race the Rally American Championship just for fun and it was like, "Hey, here's one of our top athletes at DC. Here's something I've always wanted to do all my life, and I can go out and combine all these interests and in a company thing in DC, and go have fun, sure. Let's go do that," you know? And in that first year in 2005, I ended up beating Travis in the championship I think he got 5th and I got 4th, you know? It was our first year having fun and I realized, "Oh, wow, this is really fun, and I have some natural talent for it, so I'll keep doing this as long as I can."</p>
18:13	<p>Ken Block Uh, and then that next year between the two of us, I was the first one to actually win a national event so that- that was kind of the funny thing that I had over him at the beginning, but then he beat me in a bunch of championships from there on out, but... you know, it just started everything in motion of me saying, "Wow, this is a really fun hobby."</p>
18:34	<p>Ken Block This is more fun than I ever thought it would be." And now I think I should maybe take this serious, you know, and the great thing about that for me is I've been around so many pro athletes over the years at DC from guys like Danny Way to Ricky Carmichael, and I've seen the way these guys train, and prepare, and do all these things, and I said, "Sweet, now I can take all that knowledge I have of seeing all of them do all this and then apply it to myself and see what I can get out of this" And so 2006, 2007 is when I started take it a bit more serious.</p>
19:09	<p>Matt Anderson Well, I'll move into a few questions to tie it to the themes we're talking about in our exhibit if that's alright. One of our biggest subjects here is you know the driver is the most public face in racing who gets all the glory, but there's this whole team that's behind him or her that's important to the effort as well. I wonder if you could talk a little about the role of the driver on the team and the importance of the team to your efforts in Rally.</p>
19:31	<p>Ken Block Well, motorsports is very unique in the fact yes there is a driver there that operates a steering wheel and a bunch</p>

	<p>of other buttons and, and peddles, but it's one of the most unique sports in that there's guys like, you know, Senna, or Michael Schumacher, or Colin McCrae that, that have this face, but there's also the vehicle and there's very loyal say fans to brands, like a Ford, um, but there's also a big fanbase of people that like athletes for who they are, you know?</p>
<p>20:10</p>	<p>Ken Block People that follow Lewis Hamilton or Colin McRae almost religiously, you know, so I think that's one thing that makes motorsport, you know, very unique. You know, people don't follow Michael Jordan because of the basketball he dribbles, they don't. Maybe the shoes might have a little more impact on it or the team but still Michael Jordan stands out as the athlete Michael Jordan above anything and everything else, but motorsports is definitely different like that, so I think that there's such a dynamic depth to what it takes to go race a car, everything from um, you know the driver and how prepared they are for whatever they're doing down to the compound of the rubber in the tire we happen to be on in that particular day, so there's so much that goes into it, that, you know, everything from, uh, you know, a basic mechanic to a team director, to a tire specialist to even the trainer that's helped prepare the driver get into the car for that particular moment, it, it, it's such a big effort, but the general public usually only sees the car roll out, the guy get in it, and go, and that, and that's it.</p>
<p>21:27</p>	<p>Ken Block So, it's, to me it's one of those sports where really, you've got to have every nut and bolt lined up from the very simplest thing at the bottom all the way to the highest-end strategy to go out, and race, and win it. It's so much more dynamic than someone that's you know, got a tennis racket hitting a ball. I'm not, not, not disrespecting them whatsoever, but it, all sports are really quite different, and I think motorsports is one of the most complicated and unique things in the entire world.</p>
<p>22:03</p>	<p>Matt Anderson Fantastic! Well, I'm glad you mentioned the athletes there because that's another one of the themes we're trying to</p>

	<p>get across in the exhibit that you know, people sometimes don't think about race drivers as athletes but they are in every respect given the- the kind of strength they have to have to endure a race which is you know, a roller coaster for 3 hours or whatever it might be so we're actually designing some um, some interactives in our exhibit with a fellow named Jim Leo who owns a gym down in Indianapolis, specializes in driver training, so people will get a chance to do some of the physical exercises and I was wondering if there was any physical exercises or special training that you do physically.</p>
<p>22:37</p>	<p>Ken Block Yeah well, the thing about it is, you know, one of the main sports that I've raced over the years is rallycross and we're battling for tenths of a second on a short track that's only a minute long for each lap, and we're doing 6 laps per, you know, heat race, and so you know a basketball player, you know, it makes me laugh sometimes when I see 3-point shooters that only hit one out of every 3. You know, I can't miss mess up one out of, or 2 out of 3 corners, you know? Like, I'm battling for a tenth of a second. I have to try and hit every moment, every corner, everything absolutely perfect. When I get done with a lap, I have to say I've driven the car to the limit. We have to set up the car and drive it to its limit so if I'm not reacting as quick as I can, if I don't have the full feel of what's happening with the car, if I can't go back to the engineers and say, "I'm having- this corner's we have an issue.</p>
<p>23:40</p>	<p>Ken Block We need to figure out how to set up the car better for what it's doing," like all these factors have to come in for me to be able to try and be near the top of the field, but that all takes me being at 100%. So, if I'm not 100%, the car and the rest of the team can't be at 100%. There's nothing they can do outside the car to make me react better on a lap so we have the- the- the car and the setup to deal with and not only that in the racing, you have- especially with something like rallycross, you have other cars around you that you have to react, and you have to be able to analyze uh situations in your mind and be able to adjust your line or change your strategy all</p>

	<p>within milliseconds, so these things have to be done and they have to be done with the athlete at the absolute top level that they can possibly be.</p>
24:38	<p>Ken Block Sure, I could be very lazy, kind of go the opposite direction but then when I have a failure in success, there's going to be very easy things for myself to point at, and I- I'm putting such a big effort in, I want to make sure that every point that I'm possibly able to control myself is at 100% or at least close. So that's why the physical attributes of being that athlete not only being able to endure long days of testing, um, autograph signings, press, media, you know the stress of the race, you've gotta be able to handle all that, but then. At those moments being able to get into the car and handle that at 100%.</p>
25:27	<p>Matt Anderson We also are focusing on safety in racing and how much it's improved and how dangerous it was 50 years ago and we've got some great quotes from drivers about that, everything from like, you know, if you think about safety, or worry about that, you don't belong in the car in the first place or others who say you kind of compartmentalize it away from that. How do you deal with the risk of knowing there could be an accident or dangerous situation when you're driving?</p>
25:51	<p>Ken Block Well, I think that anybody that gets themselves in a situation like this says, "I'm gonna go race, and I have to race flat-out." You've already- you've already accepted that there's a risk. You don't do this without understanding that ultimately there could be a large crash and a bad injury and especially uh, when I race Stage Rally, you're out in these forests in the middle of nowhere, you've- most of the time you've done reces so you've driven down the road in a rental car twice and looked at it at 35 miles an hour estimating that, how you're gonna attack this corner at 90 miles per hour.</p>
26:30	<p>Ken Block That's never gonna be perfect and I've had big crashes where I've made a mistake in my notes or attacked the corner too aggressively because I was trying to win the</p>

	<p>championship, um, but these things happen. But I can't do that thinking that an accident's gonna happen and what's the result of that? You can't think that way. You have to think, "I wanna finish this race and try and win." That should be your number one goal, but the accidents do happen and very unusual things. I've rolled a car because my skid plate caught on a curb really unusually when I was passing for the lead in a rallycross race. I never thought that would happen. I flipped upside down, car caught on fire. I would have never- I was passing for the lead. I would have never expected that would happen.</p>
27:23	<p>Ken Block I was on a beautiful island called Barbados, like the last place I expected to be was upside down with an oil fire and people trying to get me out as fast as possible, but that's what happens so you have to accept these risks to be able to race a car.</p>
27:41	<p>Matt Anderson Let me ask you if you've got any particular career accomplishments or favorite memories from your Rally career, of which you're proud?</p>
27:50	<p>Ken Block Uh, I've, I've been very lucky that I've been able to do a wide range of things from being able to race in the WRC to racing in the World Rallycross Championship and from that even, jumping completely opposite ways, being able to you know, have a place like San Francisco as a playground to make a Gymkhana video, so I'm probably one of the luckiest race car drivers in the world that I've been able to do a couple of different genres of racing along with doing it in probably one of the most fun ways possible, so uh, trying to put all that into perspective, there are things like, you know, racing with, you know, the late great Colin McRae and racing him twice in the X Games which the fact that X Games had Rally and Rallycross basically in it and we got X Games medals for doing that sort of thing was really incredible so I'd say that, probably the coolest, one of the coolest moments in my life really was, you know, racing in the X Games against Colin McRae twice and two different races he</p>

	actually rolled his car one time leading and he ended up second overall uh behind Travis Pastrana with me, third.
29:07	Ken Block And the other time we were actually head-to-head in a super special type, uh, race in a stadium and he actually rolled again and I moved on in the bracket racing eliminating him and he later admitted to me uh, that I was slightly ahead of him, and that put the pressure on him to push harder and he ended up crashing so it's- it's, like I said, there's been a lot of cool moments in my career, but you know Colin was someone I really looked up to. He was a world champion before I even started racing and then to be able to get into the car and race with him for a couple of events was, very, probably the biggest highlight of my career.
29:49	Matt Anderson You good, you gonna need a break or anything?
29:52	Ken Block Nope. Good.
29:53	Matt Anderson Excellent, we'll just go right into the Gymkhana questions, of course. Start first of all, I guess, with the big one, gymkhana is a 19th-century word for basically horseback-riding skill, games with the horseback-riding skills. I'm curious where you first heard this term and what is it about the term that fits what you do so well?
30:11	Ken Block Well- well, Gymkhana was actually brought to my attention in the early part of my career as a way to get more seat time uh, racing cars but in a very cheap way. Rally happens to be very expensive and uh, and there's a certain limitation to it in America that really kind of bothered me which is that we don't have tarmac rallies in the states, so, you know I grew up seeing Rally cars slide around through these hairpins in Monte Carlo, and Corsica, and Spain, and that's what I wanted to do.
30:45	Ken Block I thought that was really cool. I of course loved sliding and jumping a Rally car in gravel um, but tarmac just seemed to me it was more realistic to what I was used to driving on. You know, you grow up driving a car. I didn't grow up in a countryside with dirt roads. I grew up with a

	<p>countryside of tarmac roads, so seeing cars slide on tarmac was just something I wanted to do because it was more re- I related to it more. So Gymkhana came along, and I became more and more aware of it as a way to potentially do some more driving, more seat time, more experience but to learn to slide a Rally car on tarmac, so that, that was the original appeal to me so I really started looking into it and then I ended up doing a couple of events uh, in a rental car a local shop, to me, down in southern California was building some cars that worked well with some of my sponsors and they made a good car that would be good competition in this, so I went out and did some events, uh, did very well in them, and I said, "Okay, this is fun.</p>
32:00	<p>Ken Block This is now satisfying this need." I want to drive these cars very aggressively on tarmac and increase my skill level and just broaden my skills in general because I, we just didn't have any tarmac rallies like I said, so now I'm getting that tarmac experience in a fun way so I went and paid that same company I was renting the car to build me one of these cars specifically to race these Gymkhana events and when that cars was- was done, the guy that was doing these Gymkhana events, I think it was called American Gymkhana, or Gymkhana USA, sorry, can't remember off the top of my head, but he had quit doing the events so I had this cool Gymkhana car but now nowhere to go race it so that's how the first <i>Gymkhana</i> video actually came about.</p>
32:52	<p>Ken Block It's called <i>Gymkhana Testing and Practice</i> because that's what I was doing. I said, "Okay, I have this cool car. I wanna be ready for when, hopefully these events come back," and so we took it to one of the locations that I had done a Gymkhana race at which was El Toro Airfield in Irvine, California.</p>
33:15	<p>Ken Block And, uh, basically I went there for a couple days and slid around a bunch of different obstacles, and had fun with it, had a small film crew with some guys I actually went to junior college with, and we filmed really cheaply the first <i>Gymkhana</i> video and uh, I didn't even really think that</p>

	<p>much about it. Like, I showed it to a couple people, and they all thought it was great, and we eventually put it on the internet, you know, just as part of our DC marketing of what Travis and I were doing with Rally and now Gymkhana, and the video just took off, and so since that day we have been making these videos. We have over half a billion views with ten of them and a couple, you know, offshoots of that series, and I never would've expected that something, you know, purely born from me wanting to just get more race experience, to expand my skill levels would grow into such a monster.</p>
34:18	<p>Matt Anderson You were kind of totally surprised by the success of the first video?</p>
34:24	<p>Ken Block Yeah, the- the- the surprise of that video, now realize back in that, in that time... was it 2007, 2008 somewhere around there, YouTube isn't at that time what it is today. Like, today we think, "Oh, we have a video. Where do you put it. Put it on YouTube, you know?" Back then it was well, "We have a website there's a video player on our website. We'll put it there." Well, back then, you were paying for all that data to go out, and that file was actually really big you know, 'cause it was uploaded at like this high-res. We wanted it to look good, and you know, it was costing a lot of money. I had to go to my sponsors and say, "Hey, I know you guys like all these views that this is getting.</p>
35:11	<p>Ken Block But I have to shut this down because it's just costing a ridiculous amount." So some of my sponsors put up money for that to stay up for a month or two longer, and then eventually it went to YouTube so there was I don't know, 20-30 million views alone on my website before we shut that whole video player down and moved it all over to YouTube, so it- it for me, some of the stuff has been a really fun experience, because we've actually been watching the internet usage and social media and its growth all, a bit through my career because you know, Facebook and Instagram has come along while I was doing all this, same as Twitter and YouTube's growth, so we've been a you know, small part of that experience of it</p>

	and kind of learning as we go and to me, the <i>Gymkhana</i> series is a perfect example of we started in an older format which was a website and moved it over to YouTube, and today people just don't understand like wow, that was a time when YouTube just- it was a new thing. It wasn't the standard that it is today.
36:20	Matt Anderson I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the process of putting those videos together. Do you start with a series of ideas or stunts you want to do and then string them together? Do you work closely with the camera crew on particular shots or, uh, more of the big picture?
36:37	Ken Block Yeah because of my background, I have a brain that just kind of works in a funny way, that, that, I have a hard time turning the creativity side of things off, and I like to look at everything from, you know, funny cat videos to snowboarding- you know, and sort of how people are creative in all these different markets and all these different ways. So really, the creativity side of making the <i>Gymkhana</i> videos, a lot of it is inspired by skate and snowboard video parts.
37:10	Ken Block So a lot of skateboard videos, you know, from back in the '80s have all been focused on different athletes and expressing kind of what they do and how they like to do it around the world so say someone like Rob Dyrdek, you know when we made the DC video in 2002... 2003... somewhere around there, you know, we filmed with Rob Dyrdek for a year, we take 20 of his best tricks and put that all together to represent him, and that includes you know everything from the music to an intro maybe that shows him and what he does to then all his best tricks all in together as a part. Well, the <i>Gymkhana</i> videos are similarly put together that we're taking the driving; shooting however many tries it takes to get a particular thing, and make it look really good and then put all that together to make a part that kind of tells a story.
38:10	Ken Block Now, one thing I didn't say about skateboarding too is some of the tricks that these guys do may take 30 tries. There may be a certain handrail they want as the last

	trick on their part and that takes 30 tries to get, 30 slams of them falling, but they want the action to be right. They want the camera angles to be perfect.
38:30	Ken Block They want everything to fit to tell the story of that trick that they make. Well, that's the same thing that we do with the <i>Gymkhana</i> videos. Some people say, "ah it took you five tries to make that." Well, those five tries may be the first I'm getting a warmup to get the surface, and then "Oops," the cameras aren't in the right place, that might take two more tries to get that right. You know, and then- and then I'll make a little mistake or whatever, and then the fifth try maybe it's perfect. We'll check everything, yep it looks good, okay, move on.
39:01	Ken Block The goal isn't to get it in the first try. The goal is to make a part that's really entertaining and at the end of the day, I'm surrounded by a lot of creative people, Brian Scotto being my, uh, director and one of the biggest creative guys that I work with but he and I, we enjoy watching this stuff along with everybody else that I work with, so we're trying to make stuff that entertains us. So, we come up with these creative ideas. We come up with stuff that we wanna see the cars do, and we all even work together on what cars like the "Hoonicorn" are, you know? And so, it's been a really fun, creative process making the ten main <i>Gymkhana</i> videos because at the end of the day, we're all creative people.
39:50	Ken Block I'm the lucky guy who gets to get in the car and do all the driving, but I have a lot of very smart, creative people around me that we all work together to try and figure out everything from the basic concept, hey we're going to Dubai, what do we wanna do? What is the story? And then we nail down the specific things. Oh, we want a 747? Okay, let's figure out how we can get a 747!" And then what do we do around it? What are the camera angles? What really tells the story um, and that whole creative process is really fun and I think we're doing things at a level that's you know, as high as some of the best action movies in the world but at the same time telling this action in the most realistic way that we possibly can. A lot

	of action movies get to cheat around the actions and our goal is to never cheat anything.
40:49	Ken Block We don't want to cheat anything ever, so that's one thing when you watch those videos you know that we're showing everything as real as possible because we went out and did it as real as possible.
41:03	Matt Anderson Excellent. Well, I gotta ask a few questions about <i>Gymkhana Five</i> in particular since it's the car that'll be in the show. First of all, why San Francisco? what was your opportunity there?
41:11	Ken Block The reason for San Francisco is actually kind of a funny one. So, if you look at the series of what we did, the first four are all on controllable, private property basically. You know, the first one's at an airfield. The second one's at a- you know, the docks at like the Long Beach area. The third one's at uh, at uh, an old track in France, and the fourth one is on a Hollywood set, so these are all places you can control, you can shut down. You rent from whoever that owns it, and you go do what you're gonna do.
41:52	Ken Block <i>Gymkhana Five</i> is the first time we actually went into a city and did this. Now, we had actually tried to do <i>Gymkhana Three</i> in Detroit, and it was a nightmare for a couple reasons. Uh, we didn't necessarily have the right crew and people in place to work with a city to get what we wanted, and second of all the city, actually, was trying to put restrictions on us. Now, this was ten years ago, so, roughly, so Detroit was a little worse for shape than it is today, but we liked that.
42:31	Ken Block Like, to us, Detroit has a history, and you can either accept it you can't, and we wanted to kind of embrace the new but show the old also, but the city of Detroit said, "No, we wanna control where you go and what we...what you show," and that just was a deal killer for us. We can't have a city official vetoing how the angles that we're shooting and that sort of thing, and that's really what it

	came down to. So that was our first experience actually trying to work with a city.
43:04	<p>Ken Block</p> <p>Uh, so by the time <i>Gymkhana Five</i> came around, uh, we had gone uh, to a bigger uh, production company to actually produce these videos. Um, and we had gone with that production company up to a site near San Francisco, and we went and looked around. It actually a very cool location. We just have never used it. It wasn't big and dynamic enough, and so we were driving back to the airport you know, basically saying to the location scout like, we gotta find something else. This is good, but it isn't good enough for the next video in the series. And the scout basically said, "Look, I just scouted San Francisco for" I don't know, it was one of the <i>Avengers</i> movies, it might have been <i>Iron Man 3</i> or <i>2</i>, I can't recall, and uh, he's a very good location scout, actually has won awards and he actually won awards for <i>Gymkhana Five</i>. But he said, "Look, I scouted San Francisco.</p>
44:03	<p>Ken Block</p> <p>I have some great locations. Let me take you down there." And we just laughed at him like, "They're never gonna let us do this, you know?" But it's because we looked at it from a car culture standpoint. What we were doing at the time was kind of very rebellious in the world of car motorsports, you know, sliding cars back then wasn't as accepted you know in the way that it is today, and the word "Hoon" actually comes from Australia where that's their word for reckless driving. That's kind of the idea of the style of driving that I did back then. It was looked at as kind of reckless, especially in like the wrong situation.</p>
44:44	<p>Ken Block</p> <p>So, we just thought, "Okay, we'll go look at these spots in San Francisco. We don't think we'll you know- we'll entertain this, but you know, we don't really think they'll give us all this stuff." Well, to our surprise, the film commission of San Francisco is very, very good and the police force there is very used to shutting things down because there's so many movies, TV shows, commercials, those are the sort of things that are filmed in San Francisco, so it's just very used to this.</p>

45:14	Like, "Oh, you want to do a doughnut? Great. We'll block off over there and there and go ahead do it!" You know? And it was funny, like, the whole time we were filming, we kept looking around like, "At what point are they gonna shut us down?" We just had this feeling that at some point, they were gonna shut us down. But they were- they were so good. They were so friendly. They were so great to work with. There's so much in that video that uh, wasn't our idea! Like the opening shot on the- on the Bay Bridge, I would've never thought, "Let's ask for the Bay Bridge!" No, that was their idea, you know? And things like getting a barge and going out in the middle of the bay, that was someone else's idea.
45:55	Ken Block Uh, you know, we had come up with things like hey, we wanna do a tabletop jump. So, then the scout found that or we wanna do something downtown, and the scout and filming commission said, "Okay, we'll do that on a Saturday in the financial district! No one's in the financial district on a Saturday!"
46:12	Ken Block So, it- it's stuff like that that was all put together in just a very smart way. It's uh, people that were way beyond you know, our abilities to make these things happen because at the core of what we did, we were still a small motorsports and creative team. We weren't used to trying to produce like Hollywood level you know, productions, but now we had these people in our camp that did that and the film commissions were like, "Yeah we love what you do, here's more!" You know, So that's- that's when things really became quite cool to be able to go and do this in a public place like San Francisco and uh, really kind of have the key to the city to kind of do what we want and make what we want.
47:01	Ken Block Um, another great caveat to all that too is it's not like we went to Akron, Ohio. Nothing against Akron, Ohio, but San Francisco is just one of the coolest cities in the world as far as like actual landscape. There's hills. There's huge bridges. There's the water. There's Alcatraz. You know, there's a couple shots where we framed up Alcatraz in the background you know, and it and it's an icon because of

	<p>movies like <i>Bullitt</i>, you know? And so to be able to go to that level of city- I mean, that level of city is equal to, you know, from Moscow to New York City to Paris, it's on that level of city around the world, so once we had done that, it was- you know, other cities were like, "Hey, come, come do that at our city!" You know?</p>
47:48	<p>Ken Block So it- it really kind of set the bar so high at such a great level, and we were able to make one of the best films I think in the entire series because of what that city is, the landscape, the unique texture of it, the water, the bridges, the you know the natural jumps that were there, some of the very cool twisty streets 'cause they're you know, trying to get a street up the steep slope, so it just really made it such a cool and unique thing all in itself.</p>
48:25	<p>Matt Anderson That's great. I was gonna ask about the <i>Bullitt</i> influence on you. I'm glad you brought that up. I was also gonna ask if there were any shots or anything that you wanted to do there but weren't able to, but it almost sounds like you got to do more than you expected.</p>
48:37	<p>Ken Block Uh, you know, it wasn't perfect, you know? There were certain things we scattered and said, "Yeah, this is perfect." And then come shoot day, they're like, "Yeah, you can't have that." It literally, one of them was a parking lot at the water, uh, that was for uh, what do you call them the big uh boats that carry people? Not the ferry, ... the cruise-liners.</p>
49:04	<p>Ken Block Yeah, yeah, yeah, a big cruise ship had come in and parked you know, like the normal place that they would put them was full, so they'd have to use this other spot so this whole parking lot we'd planned on using was full of cars, and people and a giant boat, you know? So, it was stuff like that like- we always have crazy ideas of like, "Hey, let's drift and have the boat scrape a you know, the edge of a dock and a boat." You know, well ok, then that doesn't work out because we can't get whatever, you know. So then we adapt and find something else, so it, it, there's always a bit of, you know, this will work, but this won't work, or we'll go check out a different location, and</p>

	ok well that doesn't work so how about we get a barge and go out into the bay."
49:48	Ken Block Oh, well, it ended up better than we expected, you know? So there's, there's always a bit of a you know, a creative flexibility that we have to deal with based on everything from weather to you know, a cruise ship that happens to park where we want to shoot something. That's just the realities of shooting.
50:11	Matt Anderson I wanted to ask you about the car specifically too. I read it was described as a hybrid-function Hoon vehicle, something you had in mind and could use the same basic frame and body to change up components, use the car for Gymkhana, use it for Rally. I was curious if that concept worked out pretty well for you.
50:29	Ken Block Um, well 2012 when I was doing all this stuff was I think my third year of racing with Ford, and we were doing so many different things around the world from racing in the WRC to racing rallycross in America, the GRC, and doing Gymkhana grid, doing <i>Gymkhana</i> videos. So, we needed a car that kind of worked in all these different things, and that's not easy uh, and having 3 very expensive race cars was beyond our budgets, so we tried to kind of cram all these things into one vehicle, and the basics- the basis of that car is a Ford Fiesta World Rally Car built by a company called M-sport, which runs and races the World Rally Team for Ford and has for a long time, uh so Ford- so M-Sport was who I was renting a car from to go do various WRC events around the world, so we just went to them and said, "Look we need one of these shells, and then we're gonna modify it to be able to handle rallycross and do all these other different things that I do," and so we called that thing the HFHV which was just our designation to say, "This car is different than a World Rally Car" and we made up a funny acronym which was Hybrid Function Hoon Vehicle, and at the time hybrid was a big thing in the car world, but our terminology for hybrid meant that it could just do a variation of things.
52:06	We could set it up to do 3 very specific things and do them very well. Eventually, we got away from that model

	because we were doing so much. I was racing in so many different series that I, that I couldn't have one vehicle doing everything because it was too much to change it and too many events that were close or overlapping that we had to separate and have multiple vehicles, but...
52:32	Anyway, that concept worked out very well with us. Sorry... That concept worked out very well for what I was doing, and uh, obviously it worked out very well for <i>Gymkhana Five</i> , and it was one of the best race cars that I'd ever had up until that point so, truly loved driving it in <i>Gymkhana Ten</i> , earned a silver you know, in X Games with that car, had uh, won some races in GRC and Rally America that year with it, so it really was a great package for me to go out and do everything I needed to do.
53:10	Matt Anderson That's a great sound bite for that car. Thank you. Well, I got a few more big-picture questions if that's alright. The first one is out of the many accomplishments you've had in thinking about your career, not just in Rally but in DC Shoes and so forth, do you have any one that you're most proud of?
53:27	Ken Block Man, tough question. Um, you know I think that uh, I think that the funny thing for me is that I kind of did things backwards to what most athletes do that most athletes have a successful athletic career because they start when they're young, and then they do something basketball, racing, dirt-bikes, whatever, they're very successful at it. They retire from that and then they do business. Well I kind of did the opposite. I had a very successful business career and when I was done with that, I was able to afford to be able to go out and race a very expensive motorsport called Rally and get very good at it and then be able to reach pretty high into the world um, so for me, just the fact of going from business to then being an athlete, you know, later in life and being able to do it at such a high level, for me that was a really big accomplishment.
54:27	Ken Block I wish I had been able to focus on it more and do it when I was younger, you know, and have more success with it but if you look at the big picture of things, I've had a

	<p>huge amount of success. I've really enjoyed myself, you know. Myself and my team, we've been able to go around the world and do things that we would've never expected and do them at such a high level that it's been uh, an amazing experience for all of us and still continues to be to this day so um, I think for me that's kind of if you look at the overarching career and everything I've done in life for me that doing the athlete thing second and doing it at such a high level is what's really made me proud.</p>
55:10	<p>Matt Anderson I wondered if you have any advice for young drivers who are just starting out not how to break into the business but just how should you approach driving?</p>
55:15	<p>Ken Block Well, I think that one of the hardest things in life especially today with so many distractions is to really focus and to focus in on what your goals and aspirations are and say, "I'm going to do that and figure it out and get to the highest level possible," and I see it time after time that people don't understand all the different elements that it takes to get there.</p>
55:49	<p>Ken Block You've got, you've got to align so many things from you know, everything from the ability side to the training side to the mental aspect of it and to be at a high-level athlete, also you need to understand business and marketing and not at the same level as the other stuff but still if a sponsor comes to you and says, "I need you to do this," you need to know how to react and what to do. Otherwise, you're not an all-round athlete that can help make this complete package what it is.</p>
56:20	<p>Ken Block But at the top level, yes. The ability, the focus, but it's- a lot of people don't understand the training and the mental mindset and even the mental training really comes in to make the best athlete who they are.</p>
56:37	<p>Matt Anderson Talking about young people you know, one of the things we're hearing a lot is car companies are worried about- auto museums are worried about frankly is that you hear young kids aren't interested in cars anymore. They're off doing other things and first of all, I wondered if you had</p>

	that experience yourself and thought that was true and then if so, what do you think motorsport in particular needs to do to stay fresh, stay relevant with young audiences?
57:00	Ken Block Wow, deep question. Um, well I've heard that statement many times, and I've heard it about a lot of different sports, it's not just cars. If you look at a baseball stadium today, it looks quite different than it did 30 years ago. Um and I think that has to do with the way that we absorb media today. Uh, you know, back when I started paying attention to Rally, I couldn't just type "rally" into a computer and so many things pop up and for me to be able to see it.
57:33	Ken Block I had to wait until things came on to TV or someone wrote an article in a magazine that I happened to pick up, so the way that we absorb the world today including through social media, through the internet, through all the various different ways you can watch TV is just saturating kind of everything, so are cars being diluted because there's more to absorb? Absolutely. But, so is everything else, you know? So I see this from sports, you know, like basketball to skateboarding that everyone's struggling to find their place and how to reach new consumers, and people that love sports like I do like Rally, I want to expose it and get more people interested in it. So, I do what I can to kind of get the experience of what I see and what I do out there through social media to hopefully get young kids involved or at least interested. So, I don't think the car's ever gonna go away.
58:36	Ken Block [Laughter] I don't think automotive racing is ever gonna go away. But how do- how do we as a culture that love the car and love motorsports adapt and help the younger generations understand what we do and experience it? Because it really is one of the most dynamic things in the world. It's everything from your cheap transportation to get to school you know to the ultimate art of it being Formula One, and that there's so much in between and there's so many ways to enjoy it, I in particularly like

	very specific ones which is high-horsepower all-wheel drive Rally cars and their variants.
59:17	Ken Block Um, but I think that you know, it's just never going to away. It's just a way- it's just how are these different touch points going to interact with different cultures and different people? And so I for one have always been a proponent of trying to get the consumer or fan or whoever it is to experience it through my eyes and through my experiences, and I really enjoyed growing you know, my social media channels through that thought process of really kind of expressing in the best way that I can how my experiences happen through the automotive industry.
01:00:00	Matt Anderson Two more questions. The first one is maybe a little strange, but how do you describe the perfect handbrake turn?
01:00:07	Ken Block Oh! Wow, uh, is there such a thing as a perfect handbrake turn? Uh, well the funny thing is I just did a Rally a couple weeks ago in the Swiss Alps. And first of all, I never thought I'd be racing through the Swiss Alps. And second of all, I've never seen so many hairpins in one Rally in my entire life. Uh, so the perfect handbrake turn to me is somewhere in the Swiss Alps.
01:00:30	Ken Block Uh, and I've experienced it uh, several times, but for me it really is- it isn't just a handbrake turn. There's a whole process to coming to something from a high speed, it's the process of slowing down, weight transferring really to the front of the car, and the ultimate way of doing that is hard on the brakes from 6 th gear over a hundred miles an hour to the perfect speed of where you pull the handbrake, get the right amount of rotation of the car and back on the gas sticks to accelerate to hopefully 90 degrees or 180 degrees the opposite direction.
01:01:06	Ken Block So yeah, I mean the handbrake turn is something that I have dreamt of as a kid and learned you know in stage rally on gravel, and I've experienced that handbrake turn in many different levels from doing it fifth gear at over a

	<p>hundred miles an hour to just recently doing it in the Swiss Alps uh, with a '90s WRC car. Uh, so it's for me, it's one of the coolest things you can do in a car, but I- to me, there isn't necessarily a perfect one, but there's definitely ones that are more fun than others.</p>
01:01:43	<p>Matt Anderson Perfect! Last question and this is the big one: how would you like to be remembered?</p>
01:01:48	<p>Ken Block Haha, uh, you know, I've actually been asked that several times before, "How would I like to be remembered?" Um, and I think I haven't had the accolades in racing that you know, Colin McRae has or Sébastien Loeb or Michael Schumacher. I haven't had all the wins and championships that they have, but I also been able to race several different genres and do things the way I wanna do them, and so I really probably consider myself one of the most creative race car drivers in the world because I've come from a different place.</p>
01:02:27	<p>Ken Block I've come from skateboarding and snowboarding, and I wanted to experience motorsports and cars in the way that I did a skateboard which was more about fun and creativity than about competition. So, believe me, I'm a very competitive person. I've enjoyed many wins and lots of podiums, and that's been a great part of my life, but bringing the creativity of skateboarding and snowboarding into the automotive world has probably been the most fun for me, and that creative side is probably what I will be remembered the most for.</p>
01:02:58	<p>Matt Anderson Perfect! That's great! Kevin, I don't know if you have anything I might've missed or... (off camera talk) No, I have one more thing that I have to say. My wife and I are both big fans of <i>Ridiculousness</i>, right? So she made sure when I told her I was coming out here, she said, "You tell him the next time you see Mr. Dyrdek you let him know keep up the good work and all that stuff," so...</p>
01:03:31	<p>Ken Block Yeah, he's funny with that. He's- he's been good at finding um, he's a funny- he's a funny guy, uh and what you see on TV is cranked up from his normal personality</p>

	20%, but he generally is like a very energetic, very creative person, uh, and but the thing is he found projects like <i>Rob & Big</i> and <i>Fantasy Factory</i> and <i>Ridiculousness</i> that kind of played on what he is because he gets to be out there and just kind of be silly and be himself so it works, so I think- I think there's a lot of versions of those type of shows from America's home- <i>America's Funniest Home Videos</i> to <i>Tosh.0</i> , but he found his own niche with that and does it quite well, so...
01:04:19	Matt Anderson Love it, seems like it's on all the time too.
01:04:21	Ken Block Yeah, you know, they just keep- well, one of his things with that was how do I create something that somebody will syndicate so I can just get paid forever? Haha! But MTV just keeps buying it, and then other people now buy the old seasons and play `em, so he's a smart business dude. He's good.
01:04:41	Matt Anderson Excellent. Thank you! Well, would it be alright if we got a couple of pictures before uh...
01:04:44	Ken Block Yup. No problem.
	Off-Camera Talk
	END