



For immediate release:

Hollywood Pitches in to Save the All American Soap Box Derby

Actor, director Corbin Bernsen pens screenplay of boy with an American dream

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Akron, Ohio and Los Angeles, Calif.-- Nov. 12, 2009 -- The All American Soap Box Derby(AASBD), based in Akron, Ohio, is at the heart of a screenplay written by Hollywood actor, writer and director Corbin Bernsen who hopes his efforts rescue the Derby from its current financial crisis.

Bernsen's story, titled *25 Hill*, centers on an 11-year-old boy named Trey whose dreams of Derby victory fade when his father is killed fighting in Afghanistan. But Trey begins to rebuild those dreams with the help of a reluctant hero, a one-time derby champ, who is contending with his own terrible heartbreak. A deep friendship is forged and wounds are healed in the dim light of a backyard garage, but the duos hopes are threatened when the Derby's demise appears imminent.

Bernsen, who has a storied Hollywood history, said the script is fictional but the concept came straight from the headlines and his heart. In September, Bernsen read a *USA Today* story about the Derby's financial hardships after two years without a title sponsor. The story, written by business reporter Bruce Horovitz, explored the Derby's efforts to remake itself a green, eco-focused event. Despite a record number of racers (ages 8-17), the Derby has lost money three out of the past five years and it lost its line of credit, according to the organization. The Derby was created during the Great Depression when kids--desperate for cheap entertainment --built cars out of soap boxes and raced them on neighborhood hills.

“We need to fight for America, right now. By this I don’t mean go to war, but fight for ourselves and our own survival and those things within our own borders,” Bernsen said of his motivation for writing *25 Hill*. “We can’t lose our traditions and the Soap Box Derby is as American, simple, and exciting as any tradition we have. It’s where kids dare to dream.” He hopes not only to share a moving story of patriotism, faith and family, but save the Soap Box Derby in the process. The title *25 Hill* comes from a hill in Taft, California, where Bernsen’s mother, actress Jeanne Cooper, grew up. Part of the story takes place in Taft and part in Akron. There is also a pivotal scene set in Los Angeles. Bernsen would like country singer Toby Keith to provide the soundtrack.

Jim Huntsman, chief executive officer of the AASBD, said he is deeply grateful for Bernsen’s interest and has been consulting with him on the script.

“The event is more popular than ever with our kids and their families, but we just can’t seem to get the corporate support we need,” Hunstman said. A title sponsorship is about \$250,000 – a true bargain that is “perfect” for the current economy, according to Performance Research, a sports marketing consultancy based in Newport, Rhode Island.

“The fact that the AASBD is presenting themselves off as a green group may be just the type of sales pitch that they need. This, coupled with their non-for-profit classification puts them in a prime spot for companies wanting to benefit from cause marketing,” Performance Research wrote. “Besides the opportunity of a sponsor capitalizing on soap box racing as a non-profit eco-friendly sport, a corporation could also benefit from sponsoring a sport that is considered as American as apple pie. During this period of economic hardship it seems logical to show some national pride by teaming up with an American tradition.”

In August, *USA Today* published a travel piece about America’s most iconic events based on a National Geographic book *USA 101*, a guide to treasured Americana. Not surprisingly, the All American Soap Box Derby championship in Akron each July was on the top list.

“People appreciate us and our place in American life, but in this current economic climate, we’re having difficulty convincing companies to part with the relatively modest amount we need,” Hunstman said. “It’s a little baffling, to be honest.”

The AASBD brings about \$1.5 million into the Akron area economy. Huntsman said he has been approached by other cities interested in becoming the Derby headquarters.

“We’ve been in Akron for more than 70 years. We certainly don’t want to go anywhere else,” said Huntsman.

Bernsen said *25 Hill* is a venture of his Team Cherokee Productions, his independent film company. He is currently seeking investors for the film, which has a budget of under \$1 million.

Akron, Ohio-headquartered All-American Soap Box Derby, founded in 1933, is one of the most established grassroots youth and family organizations in the United States. The Soap Box Derby sanctions races year round in over 150 cities and communities in the U.S. and in six foreign countries. The annual world championship is held each July at Derby Downs in Akron. ###