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ROLLER DERBY DOLLS

In the sprawling outer suburbs of Brisbane, a revolution is brewing. A sassy group of women from all walks of life has a dream: to resurrect the lost sport of full-contact roller derby in Australia.



SCREEN
AUSTRALIA



Pacific Film and
Television Commission





Key Credits

Co-writer/Director - **Phoebe Hart**

Co-writer - **Erin McBean**

Producer - **Vickie Gest**

Narrator - **Meshel Laurie**

Editor - **Rebecca Richardson**

Director of Photography - **Dan Macarthur**

Sound Editor/Composer - **John Willsteed**

Executive Producer for Freshwater Productions - **Trish Lake**

Executive Producer for Film Australia - **Mark Hamlyn**

Duration - **26 minutes**

Website - <http://www.filmaust.com.au/rollerderbydolls>

Myspace - <http://www.myspace.com/rollerderbydolls>

Roller Derby Dolls is a Film Australia National Interest Program in association with Freshwater Productions.

Produced in association with the Pacific Film and Television Commission and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

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Roller Derby Dolls was produced under the National Interest Program of the Government-owned production company Film Australia which merged with the Australian Film Commission and Film Finance Corporation on 1 July 2008 to become Screen Australia.



Silhouette of skater. Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia



ROLLER DERBY DOLLS

Synopses

One paragraph

In the sprawling outer suburbs of Brisbane, a revolution is brewing. A sassy group of women from all walks of life has a dream: to resurrect the lost sport of full-contact roller derby in Australia.

Led by their president Evil Doll, and despite none having experience in business, the roller girls have set up a roller derby league, one of 220 now dotted around the globe.

Roller Derby Dolls is a story of female empowerment and of women with a dream—the dream of inspiring women in Australia to strap on the skates and give the sport a go.

One page

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Led by their president Evil Doll, and despite none having experience in business, the roller girls have set up a roller derby league, one of 220 now dotted around the globe.

Born in the United States in the 1920s, full-contact roller derby took off around the world before fading into obscurity in the 1980s. Thirty years later, it has sprung up again, driven by the passion of suburban women: nurses, artists, tattooists and driving instructors—wives and mothers by day, hell on wheels at night.

Many are heavily tattooed and pierced, living lifestyles out of step with mainstream society. They are rebels, misfits, rockabillies and punks. But on the rink they are a team, setting aside their daily lives, adopting derby names such as Doris Daynger and Nicky Knockout and wearing fishnet stockings, hotpants, striped socks, corsets and studded belts.

Roller Derby Dolls is a story of female empowerment, friendship and struggles—all on old-school roller skates.



The Black Heart Belles team (left) and the Soda Pop Slammers team in uniform. Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia



ROLLER DERBY DOLLS

Background

The sport of roller derby was born in the United States in the 1920s and over the next 50 years it gained popularity around the world. Originally it featured men and women who were paid to perform staged bouts of hostility as entertainment, with skaters selected, promoted and toured by businessmen in a similar style to rock'n'roll wrestling.

In Australia, roller derby was promoted as "Roller Game" during the 1960s and 1970s, but by the 1980s it had all but disappeared.



Evil Doll (aka Anita) with Sun State Roller Girl team members.
Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia

Then, 30 years after fading into obscurity, the sport experienced a grassroots revival centred on Austin, Texas. Soon women had formed leagues in urban centres across North America, growing to 50 leagues by the end of 2005 and 130 a year later.

The popularity spread around the world with all leagues characterised by a do-it-yourself ethic—a sport run by the women who skate, for the women who skate. Rules were introduced and those who flout them face the sin bin or banishment.

The revival reached Australia in 2007 with leagues now operating in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

Many of those who participate in roller derby classify themselves as exhibitionists; they are heavily tattooed and pierced, they adopt derby names such as Evil Doll, Dead Meat, Nicky Knockout, Annabelle Lecter and Punchy Bruiser and wear fishnet stockings, hotpants, striped socks, corsets and studded belts.

They have a language of their own too, where "take that bitch down" is derby slang meaning to "jump the jammer" and stop her in any way

possible, "track rash" is a nasty stinging burn caused when exposed skin hits the track and "Spank Alley" is the place bad roller girls are sent when they break the rules.

Most are outsiders—rebels, misfits, rockabillies and punks—women who don't quite fit in to mainstream society.

While men are involved as coaches, umpires or running the roller-skating rinks where the women "scrimmage", or hold practice bouts, only the women may skate.

"You have to have motivation, you have to have determination, you have to have ovaries or at least be a woman, you have to be athletic, you have to take yourself seriously and have self respect," Texas Roller Derby Girl Nadia Keen, AKA Smarty Pants, explains.

For many of the women in Roller Derby Dolls, the sport has changed their lives. "It's a sport that women have craved for and should never have gone away," says Brisbane driving instructor Anita Knight, AKA Evil Doll. "I think it's an amazing sport and an amazing empowerment for women . . . My dream for roller derby was to inspire every woman in Australia to get on roller skates and give this sport a go. I think that dream's just beginning."



Dead Meat (aka Carla) in action.
Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia



ROLLER DERBY DOLLS

Featured Derby Dolls



Evil Doll (aka Anita).
Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia

Evil Doll (AKA Anita), driving instructor: "One night I was on the computer and that's when I started reading about Roller Derby and I went 'This is awesome; I so want to do this.'"

Mimsy Mayhem (AKA Miriam), tattooist: "It's kind of like I feel like I can be myself finally and this is an environment where the style that I like is not only accepted, it's kind of the norm . . . The big difference between Miriam Gleeson and Mimsy Mayhem is that Mimsy Mayhem doesn't have a husband or two kids or a job. She just skates around the rink and has fun."

Doris Daynger (AKA Vicki), factory manager: "I just really, really like seeing girls turning up that are alternative and they think that nobody could possibly understand where they're coming from. And they can come along and strap on some skates and really take out their aggression on the rink."



Mimsy Mayhem (aka Miriam).
Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia

Dead Meat (AKA Carla), artist: "Dead Meat is like a line from my favourite movie, Rocky III. Clubber Lang, played by Mr T, says to Rocky Balboa as they shape up and touch mitts, "Dead meat"."

Nicky Knockout (AKA Nicole), dental nurse: "Part of the beauty of Roller Derby is even though the girls are all my gorgeous friends, when I am Nicky Knockout on the rink, it doesn't matter if they get hurt and I don't have to run to anyone's rescue . . . that's part of being a Roller Derby girl—just knocking the crap out of the people you love the most."

Smarty Pants (AKA Nadia), Texas Roller Derby Girl: "You have to have motivation, you have to have determination, you have to have ovaries or at least be a woman, you have to be athletic, you have to take yourself seriously and have self respect."



Two roller derby teams (the Black Heart Belles and the Soda Pop Slammers) prepare to bout.
Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia

About The Sun State Roller Girls

The Sun State Roller Girls are a non-profit organisation dedicated to developing and promoting the sport of women's Flat Track Roller Derby by facilitating the development of athletic ability, sports woman-ship and goodwill among league members. They aspire to create a community of skaters that advances the sport of women's Roller Derby and expands opportunities for all women to participate and be part of a team. They promote the empowerment of women in a safe and organised environment that fosters the health, well-being and personal growth of skaters. They honour diversity and encourage self-expression and are committed to building a network of friendship and support among skaters.

Their league members are unique but share the common goals: to have fun, to push their physical limits, and to challenge the way people view women.



ROLLER DERBY DOLLS

Roller Derby Slang

Blockers: Each team has up to three blockers on the track. They make 'holes' in the pack for their jammer to get through and block the opposing teams jammer.

Butty Block: The art of using your derrière to block the jammer.

Bout: A roller derby game.

Can Opener: A lethal block.

Cutting the track: Crossing the inside track boundary to rejoin the pack after a fall.

Fishnet burn: A stippled effect that comes from falling while wearing fishnet stockings.

Fresh meat: The affectionate term for new recruits who will eventually need to pass a skills test before being placed on a team.

Jam: A two-minute scoring session.

Jammer: Sprint skater marked by a star on her helmet who breaks through the pack and scores points by lapping opposing team members.

Lead Jammer: The first jammer to break through the pack calls an end to the jam by putting her hands on her hips.

Pivot: Blocker marked with a striped helmet who sets the pace of the pack by skating in front. Pivot's also play offense and defense with the jammers.

Rail Hugger: A skater who won't let go of the sides of the track.

Wall: Several blockers skating together in a line across the track to block the jammer.

Whip: A move a blocker uses to 'sling-shot' a jammer through the pack.



Evil Doll's skates and helmet. Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia



Evil Doll (aka Anita) Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia



ROLLER DERBY DOLLS



Roller Derby Dolls film crew on location. From left to right Boris Zoulek (Grip), Dan Macarthur (Director of Photography), Vickie Gest (Producer) and Phoebe Hart (Director/Co-writer).
Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia

Production Story

When Queensland screenwriter Erin McBean stumbled upon the MySpace page kept by Brisbane roller derby girl Evil Doll, she knew the emergence of the roller derby in Australia would make a great subject for a film.

During their first trip to a skating rink in Brisbane's sprawling outer-suburban Logan City, co-writer and director Phoebe Hart and associate producer Eve Williamson were similarly convinced.

"From the start, we could tell we'd hit the proverbial documentary jackpot," Hart says. "Here were these incredibly tough looking women—many of them covered in tattoos and really alternative—yet there was so much love in the place for what they were doing, and for each other."

During that first, sweltering night at the Brisbane skating rink, the filmmakers met Evil Doll, a driving instructor by day, hell on wheels by night. She had the enormous, self-appointed task of coordinating and stimulating the growth of a burgeoning full-contact sport. Supporting her were her friends Mimsy Mayhem, a tattooist and mother-of-two, and Doris Daynger, a bubbly burlesque bombshell.

Filed and edited over a year, *Roller Derby Dolls* follows the women of Sun State Roller Girls, led by their president Anita Knight (AKA Evil Doll), as they battle to establish their sport. It includes interviews with the roller girls, footage of them skating and shows their very different lives away from the rink.

It introduces the participants, including the shy, tomboy artist Carla Baxter, who adopted the moniker Dead Meat and transformed herself into a confident, sexy femme fatale through her involvement in roller derby, and Nicole Ennever, a dental nurse who relishes "knocking the crap out of" those she loves most as her roller derby alter ego Nicky Knockout.

"Erin, Eve and I were the same age and into the same things as the roller girls, so we immediately felt comfortable with them and them with us," Hart says.

"It was always fun, but they could also be brutally honest. They rarely held back from saying what they thought—usually peppered with expletives—so you always knew where you stood with them and when the film crew was stepping on toes."

Although mostly filmed by a two-person crew, capturing a fantasy bout between two Brisbane roller derby teams—the Black Heart Belles and the Sodapop Slammers—required multiple camera crews, helmet cam, skate cam, cranes, tracking vehicles and hours of skating as the roller girls repeated the same sequence over and over for the film.

"They gave us amazing access and we learned to expect the unexpected. You never really knew what someone might say next, or when someone would fall over and be injured, or even when a fight would break out. We had to be prepared for anything."

The filmmakers felt so at home in the roller derby world that they began to attend beginner's roller derby skate sessions.

"We really felt like we were part of the roller derby team," Hart says.

"Hopefully we'll have the opportunity to skate with the roller girls once again now that the film has wrapped. It's my hope that the audience will fall in love with the girls, their world at the skate rink and their passion, roller derby."



ROLLER DERBY DOLLS



Co-Writer / Director Phoebe Hart.
Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia

About the co-writer/director – PHOEBE HART

After completing a degree in film and television production at the Queensland University of Technology, Phoebe Hart went on to be a finalist in ABC Television's Race Around the World. Next, she produced a documentary about travelling around Tasmania with four other ex-racers, *The Full Kombi*, also for the ABC, before moving on to produce documentaries for Recovery, Fly TV and George Negus Tonight.

Phoebe joined Network Ten's popular children's program *Totally Wild*, and worked as a researcher, writer, coordinator and producer on programs including *Future Farming*, *Living Smarter* and *The Tarkine*.

Phoebe now works as a freelance producer and director through her company, hartflicker. Her acclaimed mini-doc *Dumpster Divers* was a finalist for the Wild Spaces Pro-Cam Award and screened at the Other Worlds Are Breathing Film Festival at the World Social Forum (WSF) in India. *Traje: Women and Weaving in Guatemala* showcased at the WSF in Brazil, 2005, and has screened at festivals around the world. She also co-directed *Downunder Grads*, a documentary series on the lives of university students for SBS Television.

Phoebe is studying for a PhD at Queensland University of Technology, producing a documentary on people living with intersex conditions as part of her thesis.



Producer Vicki Gest. Photo by Jimmy Malecki
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About the producer – VICKIE GEST

Vickie Gest has worked in the Queensland film industry since 1996 and is a producer and managing director of VizPoets Pty Ltd.

She has a strong interest in independent films with a message and produced a film about the human-tissue trade in Australia, *Over My Dead Body*, in collaboration with ABC Television. Other credits include *Ascension*, *Hole in the Wall*, *Bad Ass Mono-Winged Angel*, *Other People*, *The Kangaroo* and *Faithless*, which have screened at film festivals around the world.

Roller Derby Dolls is one of two half-hour documentaries Gest has made for Film Australia and the ABC; the other is *Rare Chicken Rescue*.

She also has worked as a supervising producer and executive producer on eight short films with Qpix, the Queensland screen resource centre.



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About the executive producer – TRISH LAKE

During a career spanning 30 years, Trish Lake has established an international reputation in film and television production and publishing.

As an independent producer and the principal of Freshwater Productions, which she established in 1991, Lake has identified projects and worked in development, creative producing and hands-on filmmaking.

Her passion is the development of feature films and—through the Screen Producers' Association of Australia of which she is national president—the improvement of industry opportunities in Australia. In 2001 she established Freshwater Productions to develop and produce feature films and television drama.

In 2004 she won the prestigious SPAA 2004 Feature Film, Producer of the Year Award for her first feature film, *Gettin' Square*.

About the executive producer – MARK HAMLYN

Mark has worked as an executive producer on a slate of programming. His credits include the Australian Biography series, the three-part AFI Award nominated series *Air Australia*, the ATOM Award winning docu-drama *The Floating Brothel, Road to Tokyo*, the four-part epic *Captain Cook – Obsession and Discovery* (winner of the 2007 Manning Clark House National Cultural Award), *The Winners' Guide to the Nobel Prize* (winner of the Gold Dragon Award at the Beijing Scientific Film Festival) and Gillian Armstrong's multi-award winning *Unfolding Florence – the Many Lives of Florence Broadhurst* which premiered In Competition at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. His latest project is the documentary *The Hunt for HMAS Sydney* which goes behind-the-scenes with the world's top shipwreck hunter, David Mearns, as he finds the sunken wreck of HMAS Sydney II.

As Film Australia's Head of Production Mark is also overseeing the Making History initiative – a series of ten dramatised history programs to be screened on ABC. Upcoming Making History programs include *Monash the Forgotten Anzac*, *Chifley* (starring Tony Barry and Frankie J Holden), *The Prime Minister is Missing* (about the disappearance of Harold Holt), the two-part *Rogue Nation*, *Menzies* and *Churchill at War* (starring Bud Tingwell and Matthew King) and the feature-length *Mawson - Life and Death in Antarctica*.



Roller Derby Dolls cast and crew shot on location at the Sportsmotion Skate Arena in Brisbane. Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia



ROLLER DERBY DOLLS

Links

Film Australia Showcase page

<http://www.filmaust.com.au/rollerderbydolls>

Roller Derby Dolls myspace page

<http://www.myspace.com/rollerderbydolls>

Hartflicker

<http://www.hartflicker.com>

Freshwater Productions

<http://www.freshwaterpictures.com.au>

VizPoets

<http://www.vizpoets.com>

Australian Roller Derby

<http://rollerderby.com.au>

Sydney Roller Derby

<http://www.sydneyrollerderby.com>

Roller Derby Worldwide

<http://www.derbyroster.com/>



Team shot of Brisbane's Black Heart Belles team in full uniform. Photo by Jimmy Malecki © Film Australia