



PHOTOGRAPH BY F. SCOTT SCHAFER

ROCK

Fat guys in Speedos. Evil monkeys. Sharing the screen with Arnold. There's no telling where the conversation will go when M&F speaks to the star of The Rundown.
BY MICHAEL BERG

M&F INTERVIEW WITH THE ROCK

“Lip balm or oatmeal?” Not a question you’d typically hear asked of a high-profile action star. But then again, the guy seated in the makeup chair on this sun-baked Saturday morning isn’t your average Hollywood type. Fresh off a movie set in Vancouver, he arrived in Los Angeles at 3:30 a.m. via private jet. Hours later, the 6'5", 240-pound WWE wrestler turned actor is receiving final touches for an L.A. Times photo shoot, all in the name of promoting his latest film, *The Rundown*. From here, he’ll drive to nearby Fox Studios with *Rundown* director Peter Berg to do voiceovers, grab lunch with this M&F reporter at a local burger joint, hightail it to an exclusive screening of his new flick, and finish his night co-presenting a Teen Choice Award with pop princess Britney Spears. Status quo in a life that’s planned by his managers and publicity agents down to 15-minute increments. Before all that transpires, however, he must decide: let the makeup artist finish her work, or eat breakfast? He chooses the oatmeal — The Rock likes his oats warm, if you smell what he’s cookin’.

RUNNING DOWN LUNCH

Aug. 2, 2:13 p.m., Santa Monica, California: Rock rolls up in front of *Shutters on the Beach* in his black Cadillac Escalade. On the radio, “Any Fool Will Do” by Kenny Neal, via the XM Jazz & Blues station. We head out toward 26 Beach Café in Venice.

M&F: So you’ve been up in Vancouver filming a remake of the 1973 movie *Walking Tall*. Who do you play in that?

ROCK: I play a special ranger who’s returning home from war to a small town. Everything is corrupt now, the officials, the police department. The city’s main source of income is a casino that’s pushing meth. The casino and the whole town are basically owned by one guy, played by Neal McDonough from *Minority Report*. Johnny Knoxville [of MTV’s *Jackass*] is also in the film. The story is about a guy’s refusal to lie down — he takes a stand to save himself, his family and his hometown. That’ll be out in the spring.

We arrive at the restaurant, park and walk in. Rock is greeted warmly at the door, and we’re led to a table in the corner.

ROCK: Oh, that’s funny. Can I have that? [Referring to a copy of his first M&F cover, the June 2002 issue.]

M&F: Definitely. All yours.

ROCK: I hope this new cover is going to be better. I’ve got the new tat. [The Rock recently got a tattoo that covers his left shoulder and upper arm, made up of Polynesian symbols that represent his life story.] So the magazine’s changed dramatically this year? [Pauses.] Uh, I said drastically and dramatically, and it came out dramatically. Nice.

M&F: I’m going to use that.

ROCK: Feel free.

M&F: So, let’s talk about your new movie, *The Rundown* [in theaters Sept. 26].

ROCK: It’s a mix between *Midnight*

Run and *Indiana Jones*, but with more comedy. In this movie I play Beck, a retrieval expert — another word for bounty hunter. He’s ready to get out of the business, but he makes a promise to his crime boss to do one last job, which is to go down to the Amazon and pick up Seann William Scott’s character, Travis. [Scott’s most famous role to date is Stifler in the *American Pie* trilogy.]

I get down there to pick up Travis, and things become very complicated. The people that complicate things for me are Christopher Walken’s character, Rosario Dawson’s character,



The Rock hopes to be a part of *Wrestlemania XX* in March.

and a bunch of monkeys [that attack] me and Seann. Overall, I’m really proud of the film.

M&F: Anything in particular you like about this character, Beck?

ROCK: What I like about my character Beck is his simplistic view on life. Specifically, even though he lives in this underworld, he’s still a man of his word. When he says he’s going to get the job done, it gets done.

MONKEY BUSINESS

Rock orders a hamburger, fries and a side of guacamole. And a Diet Coke.

ROCK: Don’t be afraid to put this in the story. Burger and fries.

M&F: Noted.

ROCK: It goes back to what I said last time. You remember? “Don’t cheat yourself . . .”

M&F: Treat yourself.

ROCK: Exactly. And anyway, that’s why I get the Diet Coke. To balance it out [laughs].

M&F: Any other scenes that stand out?

ROCK: One scene that I loved — Seann and I were hanging upside down from ropes in the jungle, after being snatched in a pig snare. We’re trying to escape and these howler monkeys — the most evil monkeys on earth — jump on us and one . . . well, he basically gets a little frisky on my face. For the record, I didn’t enjoy it.

M&F: You filmed this in Hawaii, where you grew up. Was that at your request?

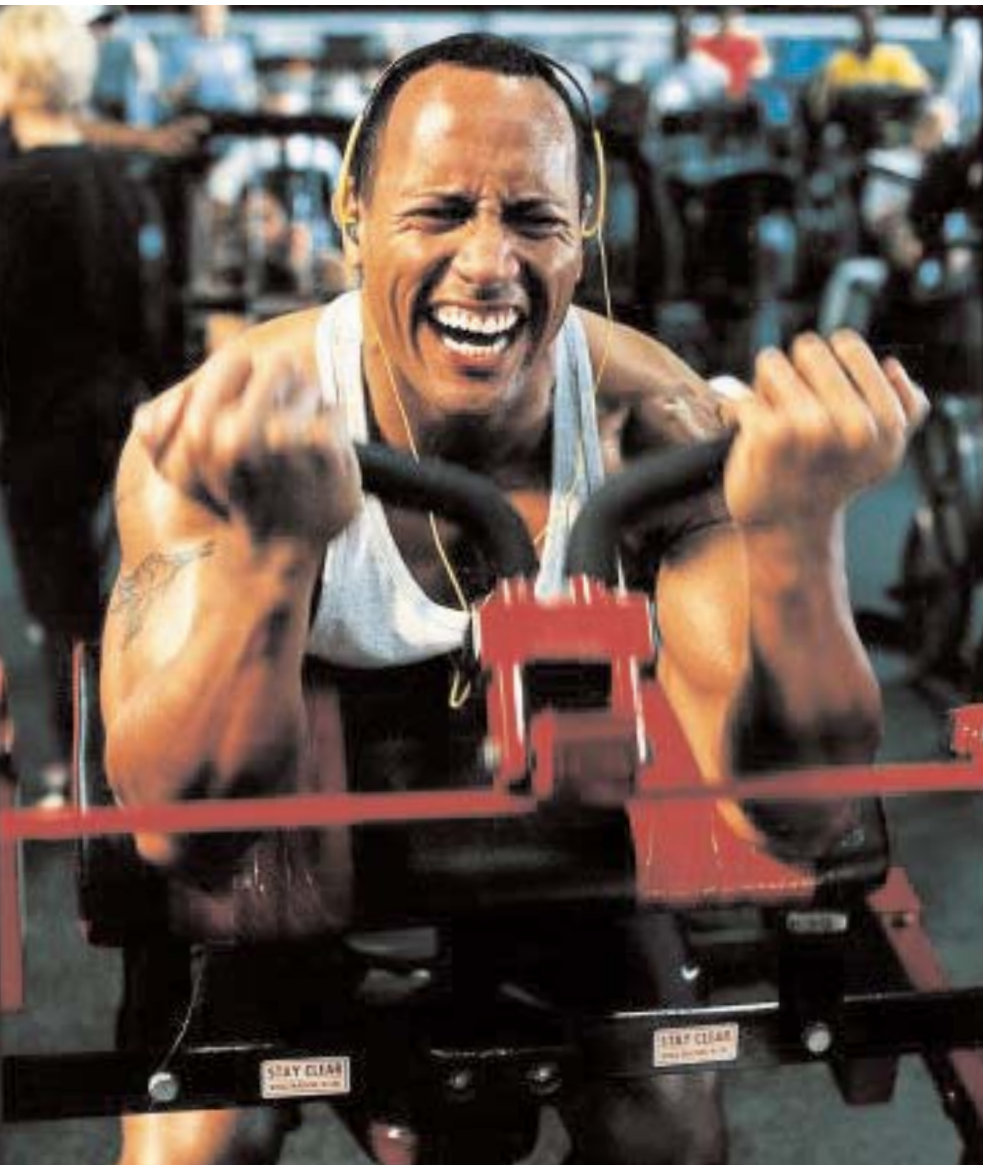
ROCK: Funny story. Peter wanted to be as authentic as possible, so he wanted to film on location in the Amazon. It was either there or Hawaii. I was telling him, as well as the studio, I’m all for authenticity, but you might want to reconsider . . .

A man and his son approach the table. “Excuse me, sir, I know you don’t like being bothered, but my son thinks you’re cool. I’m wondering if I could introduce you.” Rock takes the time to talk to them both, signing an autograph before turning back to me.

ROCK: So Peter, the producers and the location manager all went down to scout, and they get robbed by guerrillas with AKs and Uzis. By all accounts, every single one of these guys who went down there should be dead right now.

Two things came out of that story. When they returned, I was like, “Okay, where are we going to shoot now?” They say, “Oh, we’re going to Hawaii,” and I said, “Exactly.”

Number two, the leader of the guerrillas was in a Speedo, flip-flops and a bulletproof vest. And he had



DUE TO HIS CRAZY SCHEDULE, ROCK'S WORKOUTS ARE SHORT AND INTENSE, WITH AMPLE USE OF CIRCUIT TRAINING.

a big belly, a dunlap physique, you know? His belly dunlapped over his little Speedo. I said: "Let me get this straight. Not only did you guys get robbed, but you got robbed by a fattie in a Speedo and flip-flops? You should have just taken a chance and took a swing." If I'm getting robbed, it ain't happenin' from a guy in a Speedo and flip-flops. But the gun thing might change my mind.

M&F: Tell me about Arnold's cameo in *The Rundown*.

ROCK: Arnold's cameo was great. It gets a laugh from the audience — it's something the audience isn't expecting. I can't give you any more details than that . . . you just have to see the movie.

M&F: So you've seen screenings with a test audience?

ROCK: Oh, yeah. I sneak in, hat on, and just make sure people don't know I'm there. However, I do make sure to laugh really hard and loud at my jokes.

M&F: What's next up on The Rock's plate? I've heard you may play a Hawaiian king.

ROCK: King Kamehameha. He was responsible for uniting all the islands, basically the Braveheart of Hawaii. It's a beautiful story that's never been told. Sony's been great in terms of taking their time and developing it and hiring a great writer. We're probably a couple of years away. That project to me is what Ali was to Will Smith.

Other things are sooner. Like *Spy Hunter* with Universal, based on the video game, which I'm really excited about. I play Alec Sects in that one.

WRESTLIN' & LIFTIN'

We walk back to the car, past police tape that has gone up around a few square blocks. Police direct traffic away as police helicopters swirl around a man on a roof, reportedly wielding a gun.

M&F: Rock, you know it would be good for the story if you went and talked that guy off the roof.

ROCK: You know what would be an even better story? If I walked up there and threw him off [laughs].

M&F: Can we talk some wrestling? Like, do you think you'll return to the ring soon?

ROCK: Well, *Walking Tall* finishes in a month, then I have press for *The Rundown* as well as the new movie starting, so I don't have much of a break. I would love to be a part of Wrestlemania, but we'll see.

M&F: What challenges do you think are left for you in the business?

ROCK: That's another thing, too. It becomes a matter of . . .

M&F: Topping yourself?

ROCK: Yeah. In film, obviously, the roles I play are limitless, whether they're funny or dark, or I'm the lead

character or not. Every time I go back to wrestling, I always want to do something that's never been done, that makes sense, and most importantly, can be highly entertaining for the fans.

I love wrestling. The wrestling business will always be a part of my life in some capacity. I've been so lucky and blessed to be able to do what I've done.

Rock gets in the car, pops the locks and we move back out into traffic.

M&F: How has your weight training been going?

ROCK: My training has largely stayed the same since the last time we talked. [Short 30-45-minute sessions 4-5 times per week, with a lot of supersets and circuits, reps mostly in the higher range — up to 21 on some sets.] It all depends on my schedule. I usually have to get up at 5 a.m. and train before I go to the set. If I can't get to a gym, they have one on set [for me and the crew].

M&F: Are your goals a little different now?

ROCK: My goals are pretty much the same training- and diet-wise. I'm gaining a better understanding of

what I'm eating as well as my supplementation. I've leaned down even more, and I'm still trying different training techniques. I've been doing a lot of circuits. I'll switch it up; I'll do upper-body circuits and lower-body circuits. Or I'll do [bodypart] splits. I also do a lot of plyometrics, especially when I'm at home training with the [Miami] Dolphins and laying the smack down on Jason Taylor's candy ass [Taylor is considered the NFL's best defensive end]. I can say that because he's my boy.

When I work out at the gym, I typically train by myself. But if I do train with someone, there's no better training partner than my cousin and stunt double, Tanoai Reed. [He pauses.] In case you were wondering, I am bigger and stronger than he is [laughs].

M&F: Your home base is still Miami?

ROCK: Yes, Miami, as well as L.A.

M&F: And your wife, Dany? Last time we talked, she had left Merrill Lynch and started her own private investment management firm.

ROCK: She's doing very well. I'm very proud of the wifey. Oh, by the way, she's a workout machine, kicking ass and taking names in the gym.

M&F: Is she making more money than you?

ROCK: Almost [laughs].

M&F: And how's your daughter, Simone?

ROCK: Oh, she's great. Thank you. She's 2, and getting bigger by the day. Thank God, she looks like her mother.

M&F: Do you foresee a time when you let up on the pedal a bit as far as your schedule?

ROCK: Not really. I love what I do and I'm blessed to be able to do it every day.

We pull up to Shuttters. The valet is saying something unintelligible through the dark window, until the Rock steps out and recognition washes over the man's face. He takes the keys without another word.

M&F: Rock, thanks for the time.

ROCK: Not a problem! You know I'm a fan. At the end of the day, I'm still a gym rat. **M&F**

THE LOWDOWN ON THE RUNDOWN

RELEASE DATE: Sept. 26

DIRECTOR: Peter Berg

CAST: The Rock, Seann William Scott, Christopher Walken, Rosario Dawson, Ewen Bremner, Jon Gries, Arnold Schwarzenegger (in a cameo appearance)

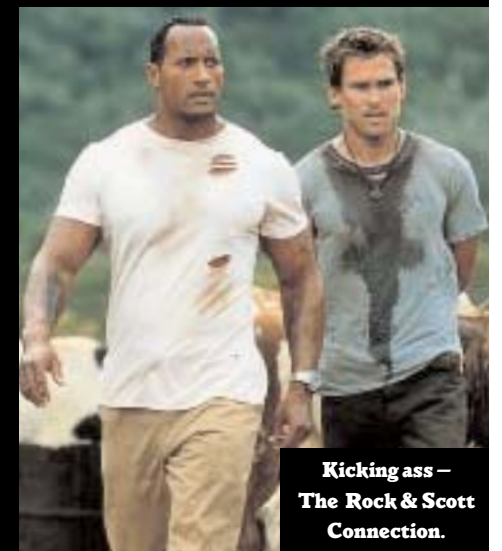
DISTRIBUTOR: Universal Pictures

SYNOPSIS: In this action/comedy, The Rock plays a bounty hunter who goes on one last job — to find and bring back Travis Walker (Scott) from the Amazon jungle. He gets to the small mining town

of Helldorado and discovers Walker isn't a hardened criminal, but a young man from a prominent family who's out in search of a legendary lost mine, filled with gold and riches. The two cross paths with Bloomocks (Walken), who controls the town and is also looking for the mine. Plot twists and turns ensue.

PREVIOUS FILMS:

The Scorpion King (2002; U.S. gross \$90.5 million); *The Mummy Returns* (2001; U.S. gross \$202 million)



Kicking ass — The Rock & Scott Connection.