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Cantankerous Titles & Obscure Ephemera (Joe Biel Shorts/Microcosm DVD/MVD)

Picture: C Sound: C
Extras: C- Shorts: C+

Joe Biel made some short films on video and the results are mixed and also remind us of how much video is wasted on silliness when in the film days, the general visual medium I in a hopefully temporary stage of waste not unlike the early days of film when a short of any kind was considered a curio. The video equivalent is more than worn out its welcome.

However, Biel has his moments.

Cowboy Hat & A Cane (11 minutes) is not one of them, in a piece about a popular dog no one ever heard of. It is a waste and never funny. **Central Kansas – Canvas Central** (also 11 minutes) is a silly mockumentary about the patches Punk Rock fans have. It never works. **Of Dice & Men** (39 minutes) is supposedly a piece about people who live to play the board game RISK, but it never works and a really good such piece would have been feature length.

The winners here are **Martinis In The Bike Lane** (also 11 minutes) covering unusual bike lanes in Portland, Oregon with strange markings that offer amusing anecdotes, while the best piece is **Last Train Out Of North America** (18 minutes) is a surprisingly good piece about the U.S. train system and how it is purposely being undermined by the government so superhighways can be built endlessly for polluting gasoline vehicles instead of modernizing the system like so many other countries have to save money, resources and make oil & auto interests rich.

Add the use of archival footage and it is good enough alone to justify picking up the whole disc.

The 1.33 X 1 image on all five videos are soft, raw, detail

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limited and at least color consistent. The Dolby Digital 2.0 is practically mono and rougher than expected in just about all cases. The archival audio on Train fairs well against the new audio in a way it should not. There are no extras, though a small booklet with some text is included in the DVD case.

- Nicholas Sheffo

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