

Kenny

Review by Megan Spencer

2006

Sometimes 'mockumentaries' are an easy way for filmmakers to poke fun or sneer at real people and real life - or even worse: a way to conceal hackneyed filmmaking.

Defiantly dive-bombing into the deep end of that fraught pool, Australian mockumentary *Kenny* commits neither crime.

Kenny is an independent mock-doc about an ordinary fella and his work, made by Melbourne filmmaker Clayton Jacobson and his brother Shane, both making their feature debut as director and star/co-producer respectively.

"None are less visible than those we choose not to see", proclaims the film's opening credits. For 103 minutes we are asked to *really* see Kenny Smyth (Shane Jacobson) in all of his working man glory, a bloke permanently clad in King Gee overalls.

For the most part *Kenny* is an intensely funny and moving portrait of the titular character Kenny, the plumber-turned-Porta Loo expert who takes great pride in his job. He works for a big company, Splashdown, and travels to public events and festivals all over Victoria, quite literally taking care of 'business' – ours that is (read waste removal).

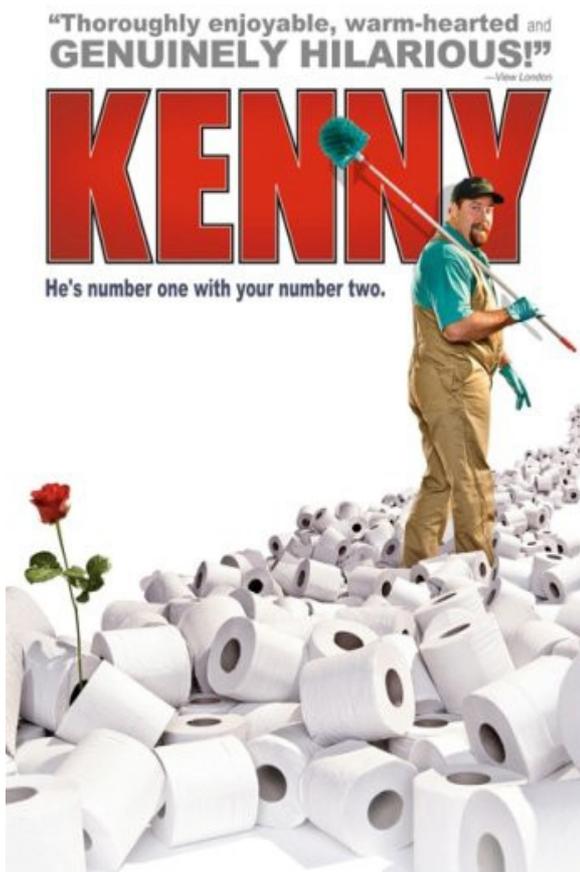
An anonymous camera crew follows Kenny around 24/7 capturing the ins and outs and ups and downs of his personal life, family dramas and job. The 'documentary' culminates in an overseas trip, with Kenny boarding a plane for the first time in his life to attend a massive Porta-Loo convention in Nashville Tennessee.

Judging from *Kenny's* credits most of the Jacobson family are involved either behind the scenes or in front of the camera, including the brothers' real life father Ronald, who absolutely steals the show playing Kenny's curmudgeonly dad, Bill. Elderly and facing surgery, he also has issues with his adult son, the main being his occupation which according to Bill is nothing more than a "glorified turd burglar".

Ronald provides much of the film's humour and many of its best, most deftly observed scenes about loneliness, family dynamics and the difficulties of meeting a parent's expectations no matter what your age.

On a technical level *Kenny* is a triumph. It is superbly shot, edited and directed by Clayton Jacobson, surpassing most Australian movies in its command of film language (and shot on HD to boot.) And what an achievement, to be able to make an audience laugh out loud from start to end. Not many comedies – let alone Australia comedies – can say that.

Perhaps Kenny's contrived lateral lisp could have been left at the door (unless of course it was real!);



otherwise former TV warm up man Shane Jacobson turns in a strong, authentic and endlessly entertaining performance as the eternally put-upon Kenny, whose life might look like a bed of roses but doesn't smell like one.

Kenny is an incredibly ambitious role; Shane appears in almost every scene with the weight of the film's success squarely resting on his skilled, overalled shoulders.



Publicity still: Shane Jacobson in 'Kenny'.

The poo jokes – and there are many - are sound, as are the subtle digs at the middle class, and the staging of the real-life crowd scenes have to be seen to be believed.

Shot at large scale real-life events St. Kilda Festival, the Big Day Out and the Melbourne Cup, they are superbly orchestrated, thanks in part to the involvement of the Splashdown Porta-Loo company, (another intersection with real life), which reportedly entirely bankrolled the film.

That said, Kenny runs into a couple of problems with its script. The film begins to drag noticeably at the halfway mark, sticking in second gear and becoming a little too predictable. Platitudes fill the short void until a couple of virtuoso performances come along to haul it into third gear and the final act. (Namely Morihoko Hasebe as the 'Sushi Cowboy' in Nashville and 'Dad' Ronald again...)

Kenny is still tons sweet and tons of fun, a well-directed and good-natured 'crowd-pleasing' comedy about ordinary life. It thoroughly outranks 'ordinary Aussie bloke' yardstick, *The Castle*.

And for lines like “there is a smell in here that will outlast religion” to make their way into the everyday vernacular?

That, sirs, is an achievement.

Visit the Kenny [website](#).

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