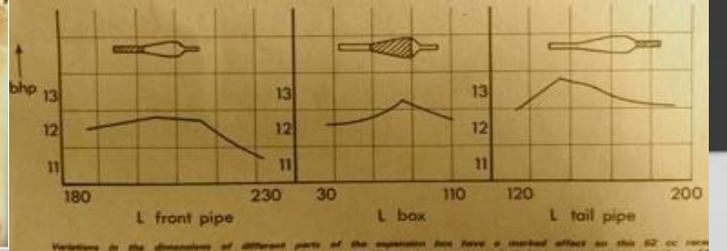


# BORDERLINE

*Rush meets The Lives of Others*



**A sporting champion pulls off a daring defection, but he can't outrun his conscience, or those he double-crossed.**



8 x 50'

Based on real events.

Copyright © LUCATAIRE 2022



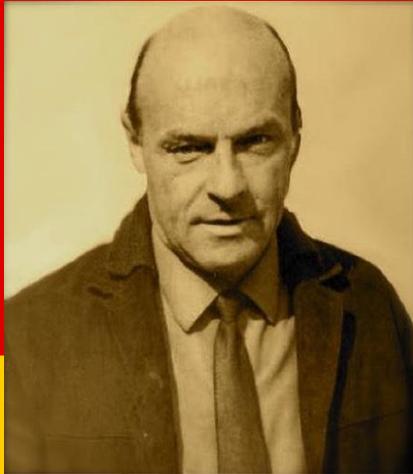
LUCATAIRE

## BORDERLINE

**BASED ON TRUE EVENTS:** This is the amazing story of East Germany's most famous defector. Human drama, Cold War politics, industrial espionage and the glamour and danger of motorcycle Grand Prix combine across the life-story of our central character.

Against the backdrop of 1960s knife-edge Cold War tension, Ernst Degner's defection causes a major international incident. His decision to take with him some of the GDR's most valuable industrial secrets will transform forever the shape of an entire industry and alter the balance of industrial power between Europe and Japan.

**Degner** is a gifted motorcycle racer with film star looks. He yearns for the fame and money his skill would win in the West and is prepared to betray his team and friends to get them. But when he gets all he wants, his life begins to unravel.



**Walter Kaaden**, loyal and gifted engineer. He perfected his ideas on engine efficiency in von Braun's wartime rocket team. When peace comes his technology makes the GDR's motorcycles the fastest in the world. He is a father figure to his favourite racer, and is devastated by Degner's betrayal. But Degner isn't the only one with secrets; just what was Kaaden's role at the Mittelwerk, the underground V2 factory where over 20,000 slave labourers died?

## CHARACTERS

## BORDERLINE

**Gerda Degner**, Ernst's school sweetheart who became his wife. Risked her life and freedom, and abandoned all her family, to join him in the West. Tries hard to keep their family together as Ernst's life spirals following his terrible crash at the race track corner that now bears his name.

**Jimmy Matsumiya**, the cool, fashion-conscious LSE educated Japanese anglophile. A consummate fixer, he realizes Degner's longing for freedom and fortune can shortcut his employer's effort to make their mark in Grand Prix racing - the proven route to international sales.

**Paul Petry**, the tough nut West German motor dealer who actually has a heart of gold and nerves of steel. He risks all to smuggle the Degner family past the Berlin Wall. But their close relationship is tested to destruction as Degner's success and wealth grows.

## CHARACTERS



## BORDERLINE

## BACKDROP

Added to the adventure and human drama, the backdrop of BORDERLINE is Cold War politics and the rapid rise of Japan to out compete European industry.

In war-ruined Japan, **Soichiro Honda** built motorized bicycles in his shack in the textile town of Hamamatsu. By 1960 he realised that racing was the best way to market his motorcycles to the world.



Across town **Michio Suzuki** wondered what to do with his loom factory now the silk market had collapsed. When he followed Honda into racing his bikes were both slow and unreliable – until, that is, his European fixer shared some jazz records with a young German in a hotel at the Isle of Man TT.

A committed Communist from 1930, **Erich Honecker** resisted the Nazi regime and was held in solitary for most of the war. Liberated by Soviet troops he rose through the ranks in GDR to be head of state security, 'architect' of the Berlin Wall and the shoot to kill escapees policy. He was the GDR's leader from 1970 until the fall of the Wall in 1989.

BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

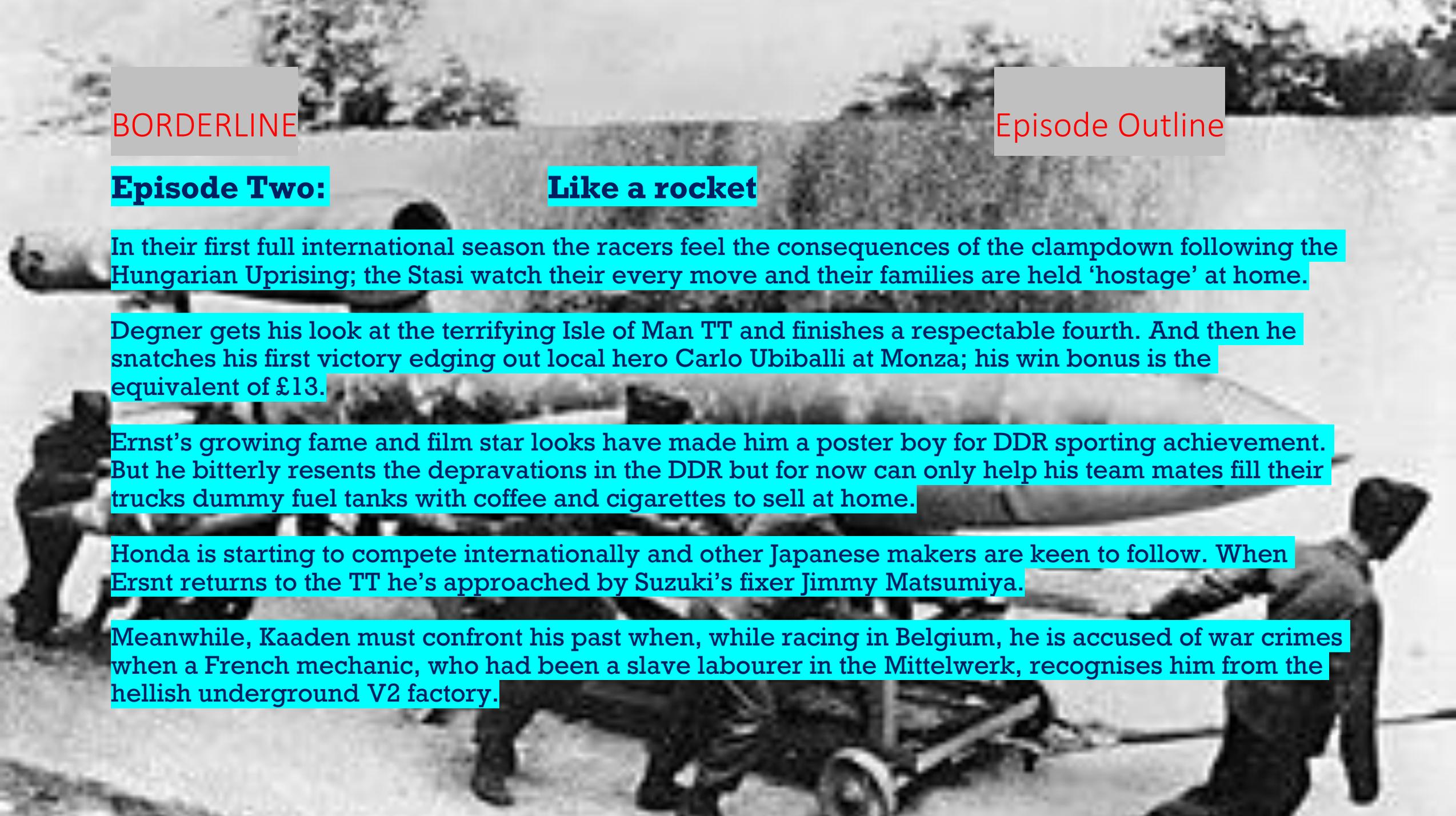
**Episode One:**

**Alone**

Tenerife, 1983. A man known as Klaus – but everyone knows is really one-time World Champion Ernst Degner – regularly holds court in return for drinks, but he hasn't been seen for several days. Then a visitor from his past finds him dead in his apartment. His friend recalls that Ernst often said: "they never forget, they never forgive, they'll get me in the end."

FLASHBACK: Silesia 1945, a 14 year-old is sent West for his own safety as the Red Army arrives. He is adopted by a family in the small town of Zschopau in East Germany, where his new father works in the MZ motorcycle factory. Young Ernst has a natural talent for speed beating all comers in local races. Ernst forms a close relationship with the mercurial technical director Walter Kaaden. He had developed his technical secrets in Wernher von Braun's WWII rocket programme and could have joined the former-Nazi missile men in the US, but stayed loyal to Germany. He never talks of his time at the Mittelwerk, the underground V2 factory where 20,000 slave labourers died, but it haunts his dreams.

The screaming two-stroke machines are winners at home but determined to prove his engine is a world beater, Kaaden MZ wants to race in the new international Grand Prix series. But at their first attempt they are soundly beaten by the all-conquering Brits and Italians. Ernst's only consolation is the wedding with sweetheart Gerda.



BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

## Episode Two:

## Like a rocket

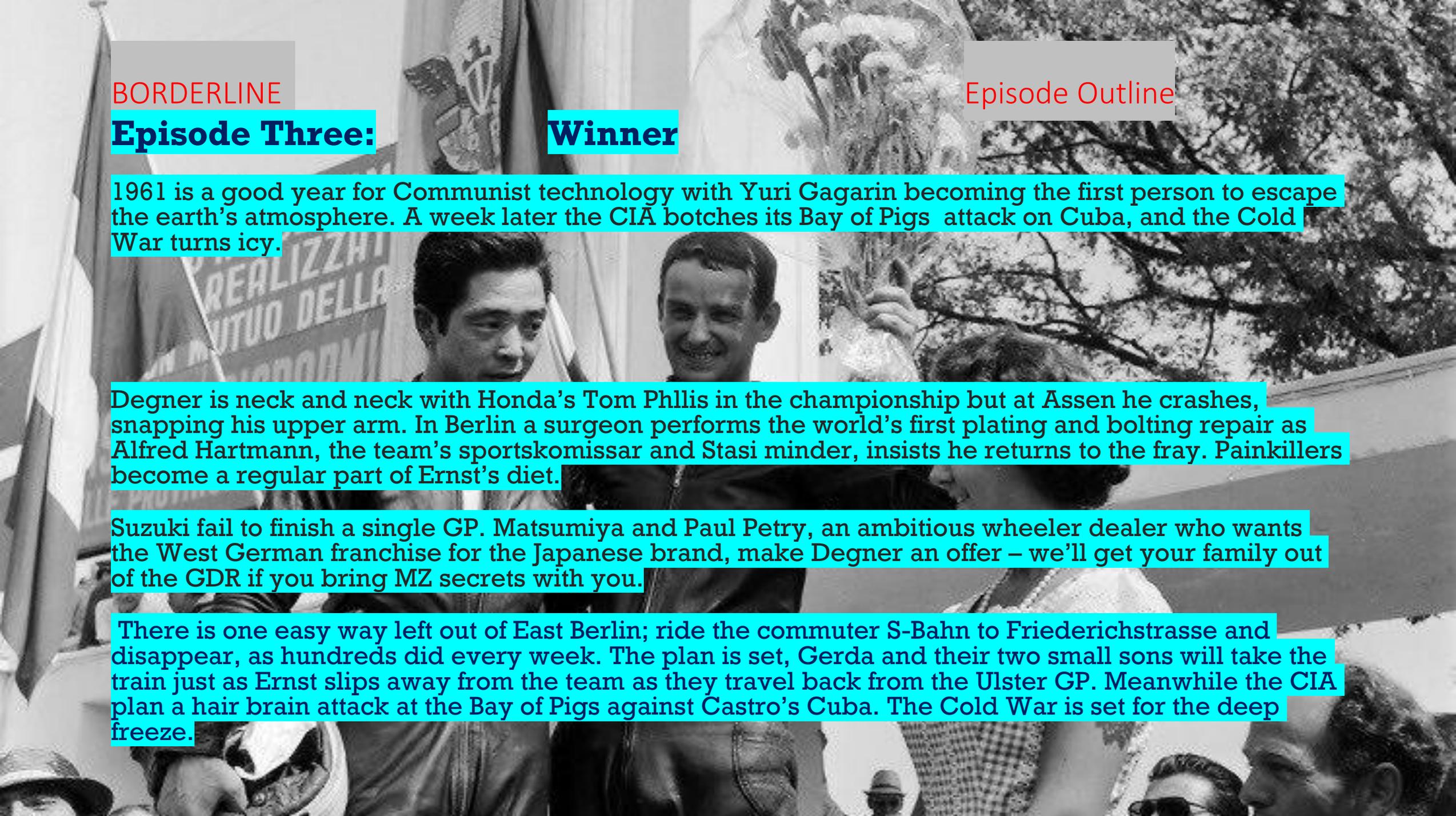
In their first full international season the racers feel the consequences of the clampdown following the Hungarian Uprising; the Stasi watch their every move and their families are held 'hostage' at home.

Degner gets his look at the terrifying Isle of Man TT and finishes a respectable fourth. And then he snatches his first victory edging out local hero Carlo Ubiballi at Monza; his win bonus is the equivalent of £13.

Ernst's growing fame and film star looks have made him a poster boy for DDR sporting achievement. But he bitterly resents the depravations in the DDR but for now can only help his team mates fill their trucks dummy fuel tanks with coffee and cigarettes to sell at home.

Honda is starting to compete internationally and other Japanese makers are keen to follow. When Ernst returns to the TT he's approached by Suzuki's fixer Jimmy Matsumiya.

Meanwhile, Kaaden must confront his past when, while racing in Belgium, he is accused of war crimes when a French mechanic, who had been a slave labourer in the Mittelwerk, recognises him from the hellish underground V2 factory.



BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

## Episode Three:

## Winner

1961 is a good year for Communist technology with Yuri Gagarin becoming the first person to escape the earth's atmosphere. A week later the CIA botches its Bay of Pigs attack on Cuba, and the Cold War turns icy.

Degner is neck and neck with Honda's Tom Phillis in the championship but at Assen he crashes, snapping his upper arm. In Berlin a surgeon performs the world's first plating and bolting repair as Alfred Hartmann, the team's sportskomissar and Stasi minder, insists he returns to the fray. Painkillers become a regular part of Ernst's diet.

Suzuki fail to finish a single GP. Matsumiya and Paul Petry, an ambitious wheeler dealer who wants the West German franchise for the Japanese brand, make Degner an offer – we'll get your family out of the GDR if you bring MZ secrets with you.

There is one easy way left out of East Berlin; ride the commuter S-Bahn to Friederichstrasse and disappear, as hundreds did every week. The plan is set, Gerda and their two small sons will take the train just as Ernst slips away from the team as they travel back from the Ulster GP. Meanwhile the CIA plan a hair brain attack at the Bay of Pigs against Castro's Cuba. The Cold War is set for the deep freeze.

BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

## Episode Four

## The Wall

Gerda waits anxiously at her parent's house in Berlin on the evening of August 12<sup>th</sup> as Ernst travels from Belfast. That same night Eric Honecker, head of state security, greenlights Operation Rose and thousands of troops take up position as the Berlin Wall begins construction. The plan is a bust.

The family regroups in its government apartment in Karl-Marx Stat, as Chemnitz is now known. Ernst, Matsumiya and Petry use the German national championships in Coblenz to brainstorm new escape plans. Meanwhile, Ernst's talent for compartmentalising, sees him retake the championship lead with only two GPs to go.

Petry begins to execute the daring – outlandish, even – plan they have agreed on. He buys an ostentatious Lincoln Continental and sets about making it a familiar visitor to the border checkpoint where he makes a point of lavishing luxuries on the guards.

Ernst plans to drive alone to the Swedish GP in Kristianstad where, if things go his way, he could clinch the title for MZ. Before he leaves, the Party insists he is pictured voting early for the 'election' and he tells the press that he believes in the GDR and will do his best to bring the Championship home.

As Ernst makes for Sweden, Petry drives to East Berlin where he will swop his luggage for the precious cargo of Gerda and the boys for the return journey. Unconscious from chloroform inside the carefully constructed secret compartment in the trunk are Gerda and the boys. As he pulls up in the line waiting at Checkpoint Bravo, Petry decides he will crash the barrier and take his chances if the Vopos start a search.

BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

## **Episode Five: The Continental crossing**

Ernst, at the Swedish Grand Prix, waits anxiously for the coded message they have made it. Once he knows they are OK it is his turn to carry out his part of the plan: he leads the first laps of the race and Kaaden, Hartman and his team mates are anticipating the championship celebration.

Then his bike stops out on the circuit, apparently broken down. Ernst calmly walks to the carpark and heads for the Danish border to claim asylum. Matsumiya trails him to collect on his part of the deal and pick up the drawings and components Ernst has stashed.

In GDR the headlines that had been set for Degner's expected triumph are switched to describe his treachery. He is denounced and indictments are issued. Then he becomes a non-person... except in the files of the dreaded Stasi.

Kaaden is devastated by the betrayal. He is stripped of his medals and it is the end of international racing for MZ, only his reputation saves him from a worse fate.

Just because he has walked away from his country, and his team, Ernst doesn't see why he shouldn't be champion. He does a deal with London-based Austrian emigre' Josef Erlich to ride one of his EMC machines at the last round in Argentina. But the GDR gets the EMC impounded and Ernst's paranoia sees him carry a gun at the circuit. The Championship goes to Honda and Ernst slinks back to West Germany.



BORDERLINE

**Episode Six:**

**Gone**

Episode Outline

Just because he has walked away from his country, and his team, Ernst doesn't see why he shouldn't be Champion. He does a deal with London-based Austrian emigre Josef Erlich to ride one of his EMC machines at the last round in Argentina. But the GDR gets the EMC impounded and Ernst's paranoia sees him carry a gun at the circuit. The Championship goes to Honda and Ernst slinks back to West Germany.

That winter Suzuki bring Ernst to Japan and he works on new bikes in the factory, where his charms are not lost on Michio Suzuki's daughter Yua. The new Suzukis are a sensation, Ernst wins the Isle of Man TT, the race manufacturers covet more than any other, then racks up more firsts and is walking the Championship.

But in Ulster he crashes smashing his knee, and misses two GPs. In Finland he takes fright being so close to Russia and hires a bodyguard, but he finishes fourth and now it all comes down to Argentina, again.

After a Titanic struggle with his racing nemesis Luigi Taveri, Ernst finishes second and the title he should have won for MZ in 1961, is Suzuki's first championship in 1962. In the celebrations no one mentions Walter Kaaden.

Ernst laps up the celebrity lifestyle. After the years of obsessive dieting, partying is the priority. 1963 starts well with victory at Hockenheim but then a series of breakdowns take him out of contention. Then, at the newly opened Suzuka track, he agrees to ride a prototype bike – Suzuki are determined to beat their rivals at the Honda-owned track.

BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

## Episode Seven:

## Burn out

Ernst puts the new bike on pole and leads into the first corner but then he loses control, the bike spirals away and bursts into flames; he's unlucky and is knocked unconscious, rolling facedown into the blaze. Weeks in hospital in Japan are followed by months of recovery in Germany but his matinee idol looks cannot survive 50 skin grafts. He is depressed and beginning to rely on the opioids prescribed for the pain. Bad dreams haunt him and he drives his family and friends away.

When the 1964 season opens he is living on his own and not fit to race, but eventually he does come back. At Monza he is hyperventilating on the grid, but finishes third - he can still do it. Weeks later he is back at Suzuka and wins after a wheel to wheel fight with Taveri's Honda. Honda-San is so impressed he names the curves where he had crashed after him. But such is Ernst's state of mind he tells Taveri he hopes the plane home will crash.

The next year he wins in Ulster but at Monza he falls destroying his right femur. Months of hospital and morphine follow. For 1966 Suzuki offer one last contract but results are poor and retirement beckons.

BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

## Episode Eight

## Finish Line

But without racing Ernst has no direction and when Kawasaki offer a deal to develop a new bike, he doesn't hesitate. Back in Japan testing at the spectacular new Mount Fuji circuit, the bike's chain snaps, jams the back wheel and launches him down the track. Weeks in a coma follow, as does more self-medication.

Turning in on himself, jobs, cities and years come and go. Gerda and Jimmy fear for his life, and for the sake of his now teenage sons, he agrees to rehab trying to shake his morphine addiction.

In 1974 he takes the boys to the 'Struggle between brothers' East v West German World Cup game because he wants to reconcile with the rehabilitated Kaaden, who has been allowed to travel to the match. Kaaden wants to know if he had really fled such a 'bad life to lead a better one.' Then the DDR soccer team's Stasi minders recognise him and waterboard him in the showers, before letting him go with threats ringing in his ears.

Paranoid and in pain from his years of injury, his old rival Taveri comes to his aid and helps him set up on Tenerife where he runs a car rental business under a fake name. Ernst is a regular at the local bar, swapping stories for drinks; despite a suntan, he appears older than his 52 years. He reaches out to his old friend Jimmy, who, eventually, comes looking for him....

BORDERLINE

## END CAPTIONS

Ernst Degner died on about the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1983. The death certificate said the cause was probably heart failure, but the body was not in a fit state to draw a definite conclusion.

Walter Kaaden died peacefully at home in Zschopau on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1996.

## BORDERLINE

Co-producers:

LUCATAIRE UK: production company of writer Nick Snow.

PALATIN MEDIA Germany: commercial development, German casting, investment.

FUJI TV Japan: Japanese casting, Japanese production, investment.