

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.



6 x 50'

Based on real events.

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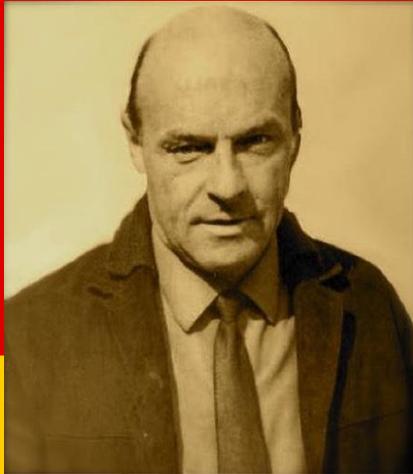
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BORDERLINE

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

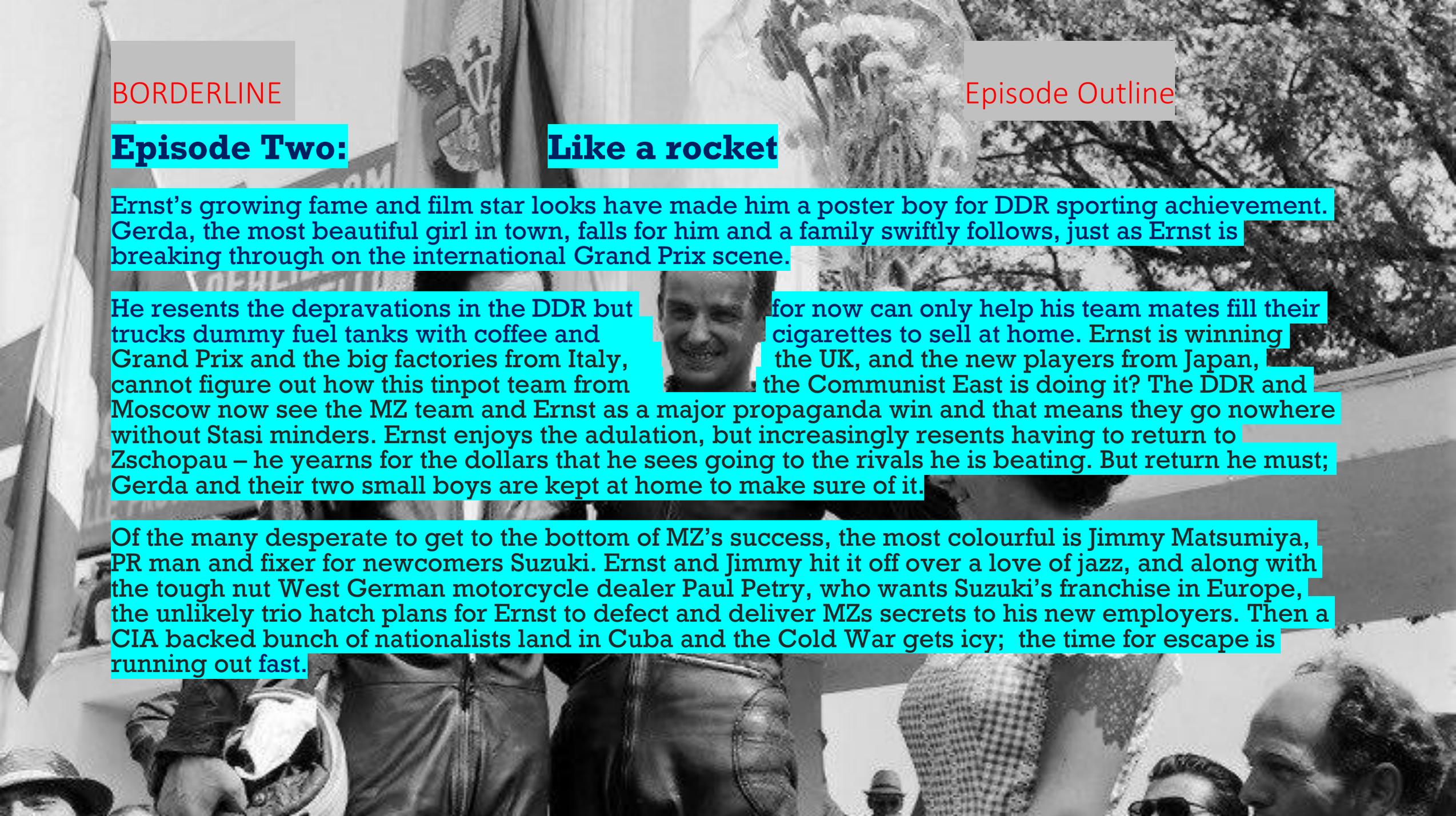
Episode One:

Orphan

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. He is found dead in his apartment, a friend recalls that he often said: "they never forget, they never forgive, they'll get me in the end."

FLASHBACK: Berlin 1945, a 14 year-old orphan 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. He forms a close relationship with the mercurial technical director Walter Kaaden. Determined to prove his engine is a world beater, Kaaden leads MZ into the new international Grand Prix series – Degner is by far the youngest contender.

Kaaden's screaming machines are soon winners. He developed his secrets in Wernher von Braun's WWII rocket programme and could have joined the missile men in the US, but stayed loyal to Germany. He's never talked of his time at the Mittelwerk, the underground V2 factory where 20,000 slave labourers died. But when he travels abroad for Grand Prix, a survivor recognises him and he is forced to confront his past.



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Episode Outline

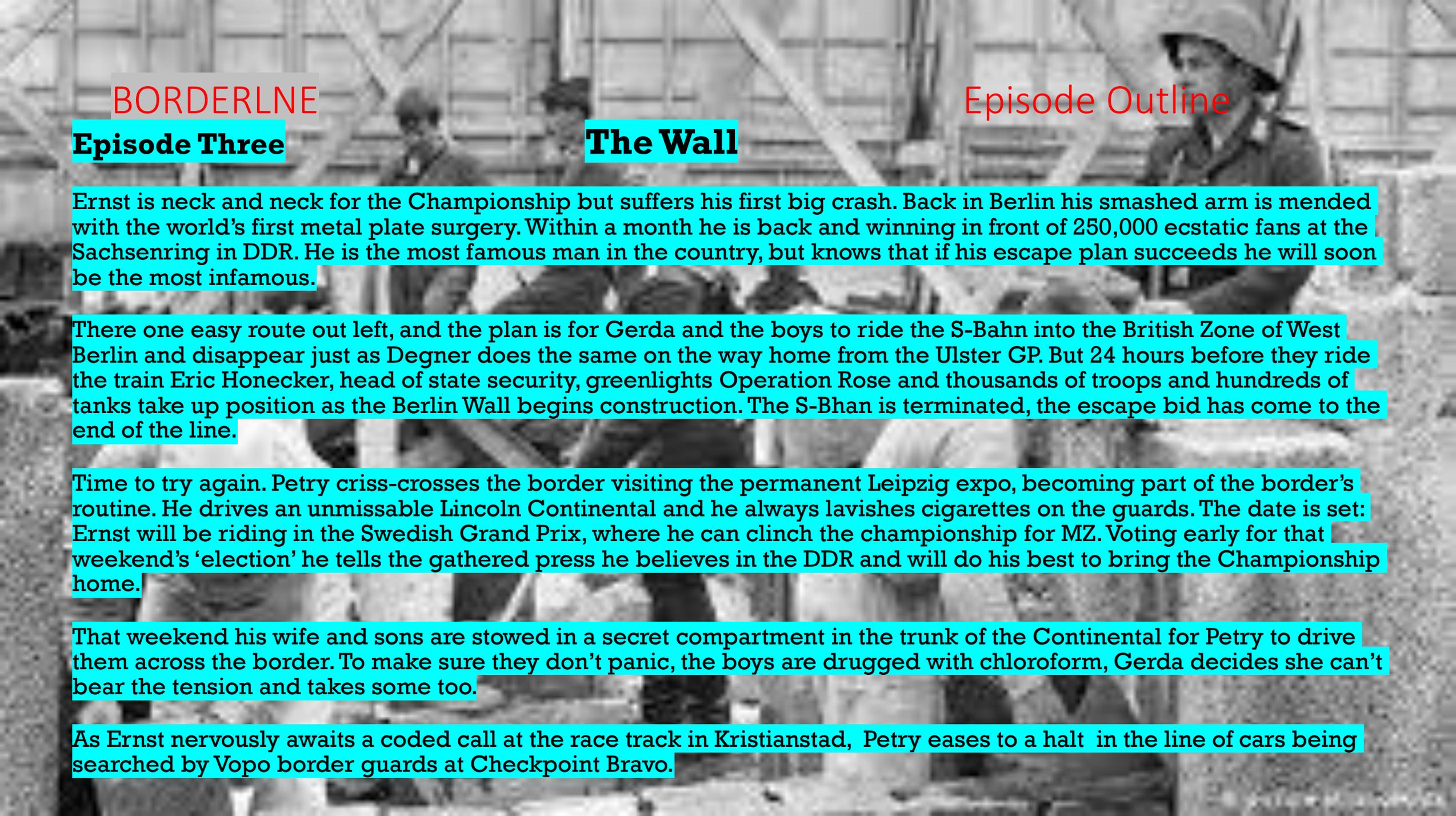
Episode Two:

Like a rocket

Ernst's growing fame and film star looks have made him a poster boy for DDR sporting achievement. Gerda, the most beautiful girl in town, falls for him and a family swiftly follows, just as Ernst is breaking through on the international Grand Prix scene.

He resents the deprivations in the DDR but trucks dummy fuel tanks with coffee and Grand Prix and the big factories from Italy, cannot figure out how this tinpot team from Moscow now see the MZ team and Ernst as a major propaganda win and that means they go nowhere without Stasi minders. Ernst enjoys the adulation, but increasingly resents having to return to Zschopau – he yearns for the dollars that he sees going to the rivals he is beating. But return he must; Gerda and their two small boys are kept at home to make sure of it.

Of the many desperate to get to the bottom of MZ's success, the most colourful is Jimmy Matsumiya, PR man and fixer for newcomers Suzuki. Ernst and Jimmy hit it off over a love of jazz, and along with the tough nut West German motorcycle dealer Paul Petry, who wants Suzuki's franchise in Europe, the unlikely trio hatch plans for Ernst to defect and deliver MZs secrets to his new employers. Then a CIA backed bunch of nationalists land in Cuba and the Cold War gets icy; the time for escape is running out fast.



BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

Episode Three

The Wall

Ernst is neck and neck for the Championship but suffers his first big crash. Back in Berlin his smashed arm is mended with the world's first metal plate surgery. Within a month he is back and winning in front of 250,000 ecstatic fans at the Sachsenring in DDR. He is the most famous man in the country, but knows that if his escape plan succeeds he will soon be the most infamous.

There one easy route out left, and the plan is for Gerda and the boys to ride the S-Bahn into the British Zone of West Berlin and disappear just as Degner does the same on the way home from the Ulster GP. But 24 hours before they ride the train Eric Honecker, head of state security, greenlights Operation Rose and thousands of troops and hundreds of tanks take up position as the Berlin Wall begins construction. The S-Bahn is terminated, the escape bid has come to the end of the line.

Time to try again. Petry criss-crosses the border visiting the permanent Leipzig expo, becoming part of the border's routine. He drives an unmissable Lincoln Continental and he always lavishes cigarettes on the guards. The date is set: Ernst will be riding in the Swedish Grand Prix, where he can clinch the championship for MZ. Voting early for that weekend's 'election' he tells the gathered press he believes in the DDR and will do his best to bring the Championship home.

That weekend his wife and sons are stowed in a secret compartment in the trunk of the Continental for Petry to drive them across the border. To make sure they don't panic, the boys are drugged with chloroform, Gerda decides she can't bear the tension and takes some too.

As Ernst nervously awaits a coded call at the race track in Kristianstad, Petry eases to a halt in the line of cars being searched by Vopo border guards at Checkpoint Bravo.

BORDERLINE

Episode Four:

Gone

Episode Outline

As he hoped, the escape is reached Frankfurt.

Vopos are more fascinated by Petry's car than its contents and the great completed, though panic sets in when the boys can't be woken until they

Ernst gets his call and coolly executes his part of the plan, disappearing from the lead of the Grand Prix with an apparently seized engine. He walks straight to the car park and heads for the Danish border where he will claim asylum. On the way he meets up with Matsumiya to prove he has brought along a cache of blue prints and several examples of Kaaden's MZ secrets of speed. This simple bundle will determine the destiny of the world's motorcycle industry.

Back home, headlines had been set for Degner's expected triumph, but in Kristianstad it is dawning on Kaaden that he has been betrayed; he is devastated and afraid. Only Kaaden's reputation saves him from prison or worse, but he is stripped of his medals and that is the end of MZ racing abroad. Ernst is denounced as a traitor and indictments are issued. Then he becomes a non-person... except in the files of the dreaded Stasi.

But just because he has walked away from his country, and his team, Ernst doesn't see why he shouldn't be Champion and 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, with no bike, the Championship is lost to Honda and Ernst slinks back to West Germany.

That winter Suzuki bring him to Japan and he works on new bikes in the factory, where his charms are not lost on Michio Suzuki's daughter Yua.

BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

Episode Five:

Winner?

The new Suzukis are a sensation, Ernst wins the terrifying Isle of Man TT then racks up more wins and is walking the Championship. But in Ulster he crashes smashing his knee, he misses two GP. 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.

Ernst finishes second and the title he should have won for MZ in 1961 is Suzuki's first championship in 1962. No one mentions Walter Kaaden.

Back in Germany, Ernst enjoys 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. So, in the last round 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.

Ernst puts the new bike on pole and leads into the first set of corners 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.

BORDERLINE

Episode Outline

Episode Six

Finish Line

Weeks later he is back at Suzuka and wins after a wheel to wheel fight with Luigi 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.

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

Jobs and cities come and go. For the sake of his now teenage sons, he goes to rehab trying to shake his morphine addiction. In 1974 he takes them to the 'Struggle between brothers' East v West German World Cup game because he wants to meet up with Kaaden, who challenges whether he had really fled a '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.

He flees Germany and ends up on Tenerife running 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. Then he doesn't show up for a few days.

FLASH FORWARD: Close on Miguel breaking in to his apartment in 1983. He's dead in the bathroom and has been for some time. Miguel says 'he was right, he always said they would catch up with him in the end....'

BORDERLINE

END CAPTIONS

Ernst Degner died on about the 8th 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 3rd March 1996.

BORDERLINE CAST IDEAS

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BORDERLINE

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