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Ken Kesey says the videos of his legendary '60s bus trip, which he sells on his Web site, could not have been released without the help of digital technology.

# Kesey's LSD Bus Trip Rolls Again on Video

## 'Cuckoo' author hawking episodes on Web

By Jeff Barnard  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**D**igital technology has made it possible for "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" author Ken Kesey to finish something that LSD started during the psychedelic '60s, but never could get done.

Working in a cluttered motel-room-turned-studio near his Willamette Valley farm, Kesey and Merry Prankster Ken Babbs have finished the first installment of a movie of the 1964 LSD-fueled bus trip across America immortalized in Tom Wolfe's "Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test."

Dissatisfied with traditional publishing, Kesey is offering video episodes — there might be 10 — in signed psychedelic boxes hand-painted by Kesey and Babbs on the bathroom floor, and sold over the Internet on Kesey's Web site, Intrepidtrips.com.

"What we are doing is kind of fluffing up the soil," said Kesey, 64, as he manipulated scenes on a video-editing machine. "Otherwise you get mossed over like the bus."

"You compost it long enough and stuff will grow out of it," said Babbs, a Vietnam helicopter pilot who met Kesey at Wallace Stegner's Stanford writers group and became a lifelong Prankster.

The 1939 International Harvester school bus that became the counter-cultural icon Furthur now sits moldering in boggy woods on Kesey's farm. The tires hold air, but the engine is gone and the Day-Glo paint swirls peel under the creep of green-black moss.

"Kids call it the Ghost Bus," said Kesey as he took his grandson, Jordan, by the hand into the rusting hulk.

Kesey bought it with the profits from "Cuckoo's Nest" to take his friends to New York for the World's Fair and a coming-out party for his second novel, "Sometimes a Great Notion."

But it soon became more, dividing the population into two kinds of people: those who were on the bus, and those who were not.

After tasting LSD in government trials, Kesey wanted to share it with the masses. A pitcher of LSD-laced orange juice was a staple of the bus refrigerator. The bus also carried the Pranksters to the LSD parties known as Acid Tests. The drug was

still legal then, though by 1968 half the states criminalized it.

Parts of the original Furthur live on in a 1947 International bus that spirited the Pranksters on their 1999 "Where's Merlin?" tour of Great Britain.

That tour inspired Kesey and Babbs to dust off the rusty film cans that Wolfe viewed to write

his book. Britain's Channel Four wanted an hour's worth of the old bus stuff to splice in with the new for a TV special.

Kesey had always intended to make the movie "Intrepid Traveler and His Merry Band of Pranksters Look for a Cool Place," but despite recruiting a Hollywood film editor and encouraging the Pranksters to dive in, he could never get the audio to sync with the pictures. Powered off the bus generator, the tape speeded up and slowed down when the bus did.

"It finally just broke our back," Kesey said.

Until now.

Babbs' son, Simon, and Kesey's son, Zane, transferred the film and tapes to a digital editing rig.

*"When people ask what my best work is, it's the bus. Those books made it possible for the bus to become."*

KEN KESLEY



# Reliving Pranksters' Trips on Bus and LSD

► KESEY  
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Tweaked by modern software, the turn of a knob matched the sound with the pictures, and like Frankenstein's monster, "Cool Place" lives.

"When people ask what my best work is, it's the bus," said Kesey. "Those books made it possible for the bus to become."

As the bus grew, Kesey's interest in novels shrank.

"I thought you ought to be living your art, rather than stepping back and describing it," he said. The bus is "a metaphor that's instantly comprehensible. Every kid understands it. It's like John Ford's 'Stagecoach' with John Wayne in the driver's seat just like Cowboy Neal."

## Cassady's Rap

Episode one scopes in on Neal Cassady, the wheelman from Jack Kerouac's "On the Road," who piloted the bus while turning out a nonstop stream of rhyming, rhythmic rap-babble.

"It's what keeps this from just being what I did on my summer vacation," Kesey said. "We are keepers of the flame of Cassady."

Despite a ninth-grade education, Cassady could quote Proust and was a bridge between the Beats and the hippies. Before he died along a Mexican railroad track in 1968, Cassady was a thumb in Kesey's ribs, inspiring him with a stream-of-conscious-

ness rap and admonishing him with a hand-lettered note taped to the bus windshield: "Neal Gets It Done."

## Not Quite Fellini

Kesey was inspired by Bergman and Fellini, but "Cool Place" is more like home movies — complete with Kesey stepping in front of the projector to inject comments.

The story is unclear without Wolfe's book. But the images create an intimacy with the characters, making them forever young when gas cost 28 cents a gallon.

Episode one opens with Kesey and Babbs in lab coats, finding a key to a vault.

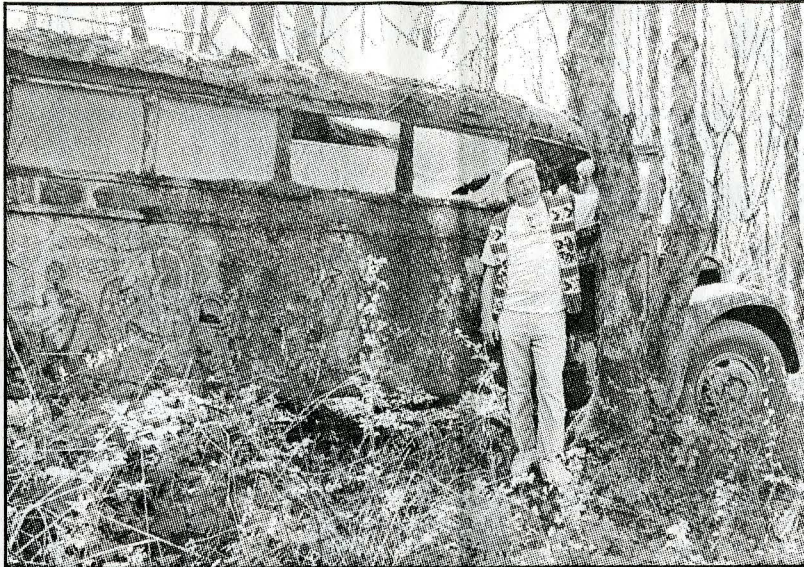
"I'm scared," said Kesey.

"I don't blame you," answers Babbs.

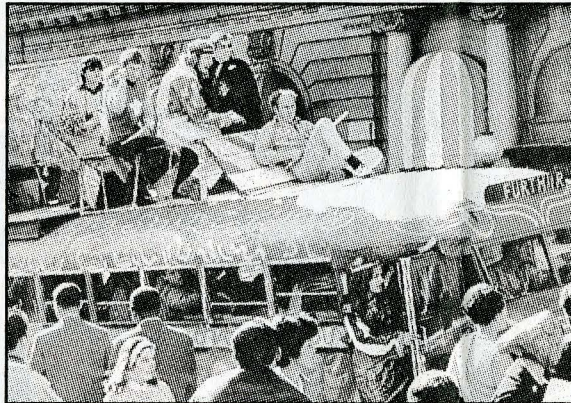
The flick of a switch starts the clickety whirr of a projector, showing kids and adults painting the bus. A thumb scribes F-U-R-T-H-U-R through thick black paint on the destination sign. Cassady announces, "We're off at last, Charlie. These old Buicks sound good in the morning. I like to drive on dirt. It's where I learnt."

In California oil fields, a highway patrolman pulls them over, but never suspects these college kids dressed like Tommy Hilfiger are packing LSD and marijuana.

When the bus bogs down along an Arizona river, Kesey hands out assignments for filming an explora-



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JOE ROSENTHAL / The Chronicle 1967

Above: Ken Kesey stood by his Further bus, now parked behind his Pleasant Hill, Ore., barn house. Right: In 1967, Kesey, holding a flute, rode atop the bus in San Francisco.

tion of altered states.

"I'm going to take some LSD. Babbs could take some. Cassady, you want to take some?"

Cassady whispers, "I would, yes, I would."

Kesey mugs for the camera with a lobster tail. A woman on her first acid trip swims in an algae-filled

pool. Dogs and horses run by. Cassady returns with a farmer who pulls them to hard ground with a tractor.

"All you need is a tractor when you need a tractor," Kesey comments.

The bus rolls through Houston, where Kesey visits a pal, author Larry McMurtry, and the Pranksters

lose one of their number to a bad trip. In New Orleans, they jam with a piano player in a bar and get thrown out of a blacks-only beach on Lake Pontchartrain.

Episode two will roll into New York, and three features Kerouac sadly singing "Ain't We Got Fun" at Timothy Leary's Millbrook meditation center.

## Not Everyone Cares

Sixties historians are not impressed that Kesey finally got this done.

"Kesey was a voice, and the bus trip, thanks to Tom Wolfe, took on mythic proportions" said Todd Gitlin, a New York University professor and author of "The Sixties." As for the movie: "I would watch it if it was stuck in front of me."

But fan Aaron Kpnis is eager to check in with the folks who first turned him on at an Acid Test, opening his mind to possibilities that lifted him from Dumpster-diving street kid to professor of clinical psychology at Pacific Graduate Institute.

"I can't say whether it was the substance or the people, the environment or the time, but it moved me from being a street punk to being a spiritual seeker," he said.

Kpnis agrees with Kesey that the bus was his best work.

"Instead of publishing words, he published a way of being in the world," Kpnis said.

Kesey is happy with his choice.

"We're the people who planted the seeds," he said. "Whether it's artistically valid or not, we have to cultivate the crop."

## MGM Extend First-Run Deal With Showtime

Associated Press

Los Angeles — MGM has expanded a licensing deal with Showtime to a new feature films plus movies from the studio's library on the premium-cable service channels, the companies said yesterday.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer could gain as much as \$14 billion from the eight-year deal, according to industry sources who spoke on condition of anonymity. That would mean a steady revenue stream to help the studio rebound after a decade of annual losses.

As many as 270 first-run films released by MGM and its United Artists banner through 2008 will have exclusive premium-cable runs on channels owned or operated by Showtime, including the Movie Channel and Sundance Channel. That extends MGM's current first-run deal with Showtime, which ran through 2003.

Based on MGM's anticipated output of 12 to 20 films a year, that probably means all of the studio's movies through 2008 will be part of the deal.

Showtime and Paramount, both owned by Viacom, have a similar deal for new feature films.