

spend a kenny

An ordinary bloke
opens the dunny door
on his unglamorous
life, writes CLAIRE
SUTHERLAND

IN AN ideal world, the man on the right would be a household name.

In an era of movie stars who fail to show up at work the night after a bender (hello Lindsay Lohan) or make world headlines for drunken, anti-Semitic rants (take a bow, Mel Gibson), Shane Jacobson — aka Kenny the Portaloos plumber — is a breath of (not so) fresh air.

In a career that's danced around the edges of the mainstream, Jacobson has been a corporate entertainer, warm-up man for the Victoria Titans basketball team and the voice of Sergio the Hairdresser on radio station Gold FM. In short, nothing that will have prepared audiences for his acting tour de force and latest creation, the eponymous star of the new Australian mockumentary *Kenny*.

Kenny takes an unpromising premise — the life and times of a man who delivers and installs Portaloos — and turns it into an utterly original, impossibly warm, extravagantly funny film that is uniquely Australian without being ocker.

But if *Kenny* is unique, the story behind the story is undeniably one-of-a-kind.

Kenny is directed by Shane's brother Clayton, and stars their father, Ronald, and Clayton's son, Jesse, along with former Chan-too-zies member Eve von Bibra.

Shane — who runs an entertainment lighting and production company — met and befriended Glenn Preusker, who runs the toilet deliv-

ery company Splashdown, in the course of his work.

Observing Preusker's men at work, the seed of an idea was planted, a seed Preusker helped to fertilise by stumping up cash for the project.

It would be fascinating to talk to the Jacobson brothers about their unusual project, but today Shane remains strictly in character as Kenny — a facade he doesn't drop.

Luckily Kenny is happy to have a natter about the Jacobsons.

"They were going to do a story of the entire race car, but then they decided to focus in on the wheel nut," he says of the decision to focus on Kenny as a central character.

"Originally they said they wanted to film for a little while. Now I don't know how long you think a little while is, but it turned out to be two years. If that's a little while, I'd hate to be dragged behind a tractor for that little while."

The most obvious theory that springs to mind about why a Portaloos company owner would agree to invest in a film about Portaloos is a shot at some big-screen advertising. Not so, according to Kenny.

"That honestly wasn't his focus at all," he says.

"He never knew how the film would be perceived to be quite honest. He's all about supporting people willing to give something a go. He sponsors football players. He always says if you can back someone having a go, you're giving someone

a chance. He was involved in it from when it was a short film.

"He was backing it well before we ever knew that the thing was going to make its way into so many cinemas. It could have gone into two cinemas in Australia and played for a week, he was still going to back it. It was remarkable."

The crew filmed at real events — from the St Kilda Festival to an enormous plumbing convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

At each event, punters captured on film had to sign an agreement.

"Most events were great. They're all very aware of Glenn and they know what a terrific bloke he is and if they said, 'We don't want to be represented in a bad light', and he said, 'No not at all', they knew they could take his word for it," he says.

ENNY also delves into its protagonist's complicated personal life. Kenny is divorced, with an unreasonable ex-wife and young son, a father with the beginnings of obsessive compulsive disorder and a somewhat prickly brother.

"I know sometimes his attitude would make a lemon squint, but he's my brother," Kenny says.

"But I have no doubt that time heals all wounds, or time wounds all heels, if you walk too long. He's my brother and I wouldn't trade him for all the bricks at Boral. I'd trade him for a couple of beers. I don't need any bricks. My house is built."

As far as Kenny is concerned (and no doubt Shane Jacobson too), there's no reason an ordinary bloke doing an ordinary job shouldn't be the focus of a movie.

"Nurses do what I do. People think I'm the only one out there dealing

with bums and biscuits, but the fact is, I'm not the only one out there playing with the apple juice and when you go to a hospital, I don't push the baking tray under your bum to have a poo, nurses do," Kenny says.

"(The Jacobsons) were drawn to

this because of the human story. It's the story of 99 per cent of the country, yet people tend to make a fuss over 1 per cent of the country."

Kenny opens today



Bowled Shane: actor Shane Jacobson, in character as Kenny, wrote the film with his brother Clayton, who also produced and directed. Picture: MANUELA CIFRA

dunny business

flushed with success

A MOVIE about a portaloos delivery guy is necessarily going to contain a toilet scene, but it's not the first time the smallest room in the house has been committed to celluloid.

Alligator (1980)

Poor Ramon the baby alligator is flushed down a toilet, emerging from the sewers a monster reared on the discarded corpses of lab animals. But the weirdest thing about this movie isn't its plot: master script writer John Sayles wrote it (admittedly immediately after he penned *Piranha*).

Ghoulies (1985)

An unabashed *Gremlins* cash-in, this cheesy B-grade comedy/horror features evil critters emerging from the toilet of a house inherited by an unfortunate teenager. Worth watching only if you're a film fan of the so-bad-it's-good school, or if you're a big fan of Mariska Hargitay (*Law & Order SVU*), who makes her film debut here. See also *Ghoulies II* and *Ghoulies III: Ghoulies Go to College*. Or not.



Trainspotting (1996)

If the baby climbing up the wall didn't disturb you, Renton (Ewan McGregor) diving into the grubbier toilet in all of Scotland (and that's saying something) would have finished you off.

Saw (2004)

Not just a scene, but an entire movie set in the bog. Adam (Leigh Whannell) and Lawrence (Cary Elwes) wake up chained in a derelict industrial bathroom with a corpse between them.



▲ *Kenny* is one of 16 films in the AFI Festival of Film, running from August 21 at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Federation Square. The festival is for AFI members to view films that have been entered in this year's AFI awards. AFI membership costs \$55 a year and includes free entry for a member and guest to all judging screenings, and the chance to vote for best film, best actor and best actress. *Kenny* screens on Sept 9 at 6.45pm before 2:37 at 9pm. For more information visit www.afi.org.au