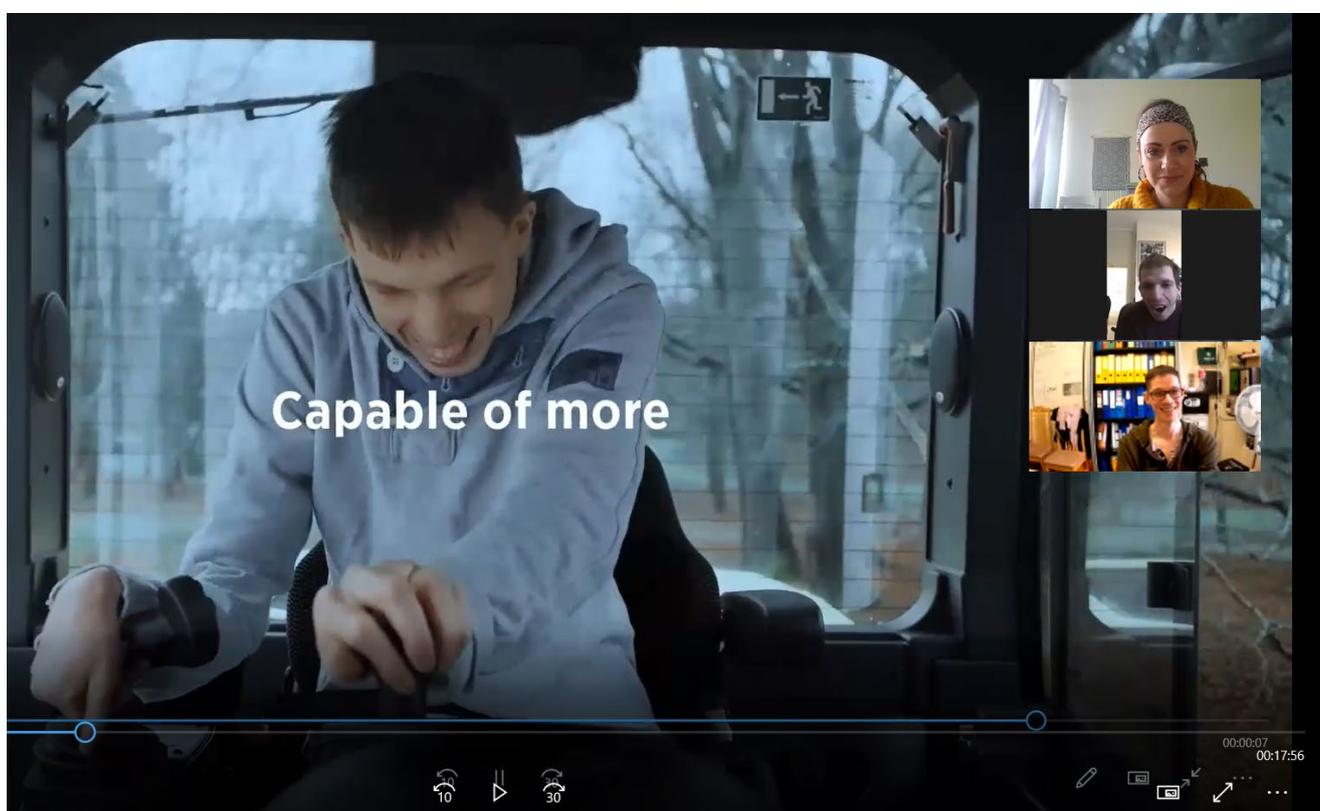




Meath On Film: An Interview with the King of the Road

By Helen Jackson, Marketing Manager

Popping up on screen for a zoom interview about the short film he starred in nearly a year ago, I worried if Sean would remember how he felt about making the film and how he would react to seeing it over a screen share for the first time. Due to the outbreak of Covid-19 shortly after filming, the release date had been put on hold. Had lockdown made the film a distant memory for Sean? After all, so much has changed in the last year...



Spotting a souvenir of the film shoot on his bookcase, I noticed that Sean was beaming and keen to see the long-awaited film in which he starred. Nearly one year on, his model Bomag road roller and photo collage of the shoot day still took pride of place on display in his bedroom; this was a big deal for him.

Also, on zoom and watching the film for the first time was Robbie, who, at the time of filming was Physio Assistant and supported Sean on the day of the shoot. Screen share over and beaming faces in view; it appeared to be a big hit with them both. Sean was enthusiastic about the release of the film because he feels it shows that people who have a disability can exceed expectations. Momentarily casting aside his role in this important messaging, he could not quite resist adding *“I also love how cool I look driving the roller!”*

Equally enthused, Robbie commented *“I love it. It’s a unique way to challenge the preconceptions that many people have about disability. The film highlights, in a really cool way, the fact that, often we assume that a person with a disability has certain limits which is often not actually the case.”* The making of the film itself was the perfect example of a person with a disability being able; as Robbie put it, *“Sean simply had to do things in an alternative way.”*

The film was shot on location at the wooded Hampton Estate in Seale, courtesy of supporters Bridget and Bill Biddell in early March 2020. As an independent charity, the opportunity to have an entire production team assembled on private land that had been generously handed over for the day for our film location, was well and truly a one-off. This was no typical day for anyone at The Meath, it was a culmination of months of preparation and work. The Meath Fundraising & Marketing Team had been fortunate enough to benefit from some wonderful pro-bono advice from advertising creatives Richard Copping and Steve Back. They visited The Meath, they loved it, they listened, and they came up with an exciting and innovative vision to articulate our values on screen in less than 1 minute. What is more, they pulled industry strings which enabled us to produce the professional film with them at a fraction of the cost. People were volunteering for us; the stakes were high; the clock was ticking, and we only had one day.



Unaware of these pressures, our star enjoyed a hot chocolate with me on arrival in the warm before filming, Robbie was busy assessing the requirements of the shoot so that he could ensure that it would be achievable and safe before briefing Sean on the challenges ahead.

One of the key challenges for Sean was getting into the cabin of the Bomag road roller which was mounted on a flat-bed truck; at around 8ft high it looked rather daunting to the ground level observer. Sean and Robbie used a moving and handling belt to guide Sean into the cabin of the roller. Robbie explained that *“as Sean is an able and confident climber due to his experience of rock climbing this wasn’t too much of a challenge for him.”* However, while it revealed Sean’s ability, it also highlighted the level of trust between Sean and Robbie. Sean trusted Robbie not let him fall, while Robbie trusted Sean not to do anything, he was not confident with.



While the opportunity to star in the film was a source of huge excitement for Sean, he also arrived on set a little nervous. Robbie’s ability to keep Sean relaxed and at ease was as vital as his physical support. As Sean is non-verbal, Robbie was also with him to help him communicate with the crew.

Thankfully for the time critical shoot day, Sean took direction well and required no reminding of his motivation when asked to drive the roller over a line-up of armchairs! His enjoyment of the making of the film is captured on screen, and when asked if he wished he could do it again, I caught him glance at his miniature Bomag model, before giving me a double thumbs up. The filming had represented a challenge for Sean, he got over his nerves, took to the wheel and became the king of the road. That this moment will be forever captured on film is a source of great pride and excitement for Sean and he is already planning a film screening for his housemates at The Meath!