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# DOBERMAN COP

ドーベルマン刑事  
*Doberman deka*

Original release date: **2 July 1977**  
**90 minutes**

Directed by **Kinji Fukasaku**  
Screenplay by **Koji Takada**

Based on an original work by **Bronson** and **Shinji Hiramatsu**

Produced by **Norimichi Matsudaira**, **Kyo Namura**

Director of Photography **Toru Nakajima**

Lighting by **Tokimi Kaneko**

Audio Recording by **Hiroo Nozu**

Production Design by **Jiro Tomita**

Action Director **Junnosuke Doi**

Music by **Kenjiro Hirose**

Edited by **Isamu Ichida**

Assistant Director **Akiyasu Tawarasaka**

Hiyoshi: **Takuzo Kawatani**

"Hotshot" Mikawa: **Koichi Iwaki**

Biker: **Nenji Kobayashi**

Miyoko: **Maki Tachibana**

Officer Takamatsu: **Hideo Murota**

Section Chief Sano: **Jukei Fujioka**

Police Chief: **Yasuhiro Suzuki**

Hostage crisis commander: **Masataka Iwao**

Hostage-taker: **Masaru Shiga**

Fujikawa: **Tatsuo Endo**

Jono: **Masataka Naruse**

Detectives:

**Ryo Nishida, Takashi Noguchi, Yusuke Tsukasa, Jiro Shirai**

Talent agency goons:

**Ryuji Katagiri, Takaya Shimoyama, Seizo Fukumoto**

**Chu Takatsuki**

**Fumio Terauchi**



## DOBERMAN DAYS: KINJI FUKASAKU, SONNY CHIBA, AND THE TWILIGHT OF TOEI EXPLOITATION

by Patrick Macias

“I didn’t come here chasing a case! This is just a ballad for a lady who got burned by the city.’ *Rock feeling! A satisfying beat action movie unleashed by Fukasaku x Chiba!*”

So read the poster hype for 1977’s *Doberman Cop* (*Doberman deka*), a kitchen-sink film from Toei Studios that offers viewers a bit of everything — sex, violence, song, bawdy laughs, heroes, villains — and delivers the goods, despite it being somewhat late in the day for Japanese exploitation cinema.

*Doberman* director Kinji Fukasaku and leading man Shinichi “Sonny” Chiba originally made their working debuts together at Toei in the low-budget program pictures of the 1960s. But by the late seventies, trends were changing fast and the relentless treadmill of production was slowing down. The studio’s production slate would soon be marked by fewer titles, with bigger budgets and milder content. Meanwhile, Fukasaku, after years of making “true document” yakuza pictures, was looking for a new direction, while Chiba was going through changes of his own as an action star facing middle age.

But with *Doberman Cop*, Japan’s golden age of cinematic excess did not go quietly into the night. Fingerprints of trash movie trends are all over the place, with mobs of *bosozoku* motorcycle gangs, “Pinky Violence” roughhousing, lowbrow comedy gags, and everything punctuated by Chiba’s trademark death-defying stunts and bone-crunching karate.

Such a mix would probably be a mess in other hands, but Kinji Fukasaku — ever the consummate professional — managed to keep *Doberman* from flying off the rails, all while adding a healthy dose of his own trademark cynicism, and even some musical numbers, to the mix. As the director once said of *Doberman Cop*, and low-budget filmmaking in general, “If everything in the film doesn’t come together, then it would be a half-baked effort.”



*Doberman Cop* first entered pop culture as a manga in the pages of *Weekly Shonen Jump* magazine in 1975. Originally created by legendary manga writer Bronson (later to pen the post-apocalyptic mega-hit *Fist of the North Star* [*Hokuto no ken*] in the 1980s) and artist Shinji Hiramatsu, the series depicted the hardboiled adventures of Joji Kano, a tough and fiery young cop who rode a Harley Davidson motorcycle and was rarely seen without a .44 Magnum pistol in his mitts. Obviously inspired by the *Dirty Harry* films, which had done massive business in Japan, the rough justice of *Doberman Cop* seemed destined for the silver screen, but the project landed in an unlikely place.

In the interview book *Film Director: Kinji Fukasaku*, the director recalls that “*Doberman Cop* was a *gekiga* (dramatic manga). It was initially really hard for me to make a film out of it, because *gekiga* are all about cool guys on Harley motorcycles with a strong sense of justice. As far as the producers were concerned, there’s nothing wrong with heroes. . . . But asking me to make a film like that sort of put me in a pickle. I had been diving headfirst into doing edgier subject material six or seven years before then.”

By the time that *Doberman* went into production at Toei’s Tokyo branch, Fukasaku had already solidified his reputation for gritty, unflinching “true document” yakuza films such as the *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* series (*Jingi naki tatakai*, 1973 – 1974), the nihilistic *Graveyard of Honor* (*Jingi no hakaba*, 1975), and the police corruption case study *Cops vs Thugs* (*Kenkei tai soshiki boryoku*, also 1975).

With *Doberman* now assigned to him, Fukasaku — who had never made a manga adaptation before — felt at first that “there was nothing for me to latch onto... but I managed somehow because the major liberties I took from the source material were all accepted.” In the script by Toei regular Koji Takada (written under Fukasaku’s supervision) the macho Tokyo cop from the comic suddenly became a country bumpkin from Okinawa, and picked up an unlikely new sidekick along the way. “I decided to make Kano carry a pig around instead of riding a Harley. I suppose the producers were like, ‘Oh well, do whatever you want.’”

*Doberman* was Fukasaku’s first manga adaptation, but he had made movies about heroes with a light touch before. His very first four titles as a director included two *Nice Guy in the Funky Hat* (*Fanki hatto no kaidanj*) films and two *Drifting Detective* (*Furaibo tantei*) films, all released in 1961 and all starring a fresh-faced young newcomer named Shinichi Chiba.

While Chiba had appeared in 1973’s *Battles Without Honor and Humanity: Hiroshima Death Match* (*Jingi naki tatakai: Hiroshima shito-heru*) and in 1977’s *Hokuriku Proxy War* (*Hokuriku dairi senso*), he had not been featured in a leading role in a Fukasaku film since 1966’s

*Kamikaze Guy: Duel at Noon* (*Kamikaze yaro: mahiru no ketto*). Since then, Chiba had become a major action star in his own right, first in Japan via TV shows like *Key Hunter* (1968 – 1973, which featured some supervision and direction from Fukasaku) and films like *The Bodyguard* (*Bodigado Kiba*, 1973), before erupting into a global sensation with his *Street Fighter* films (*Satsujin ken*, 1974 – 1976) and related martial arts outings.

Fukasaku remembered, “He had been doing a bunch of those karate films, but he didn’t want to rest on his laurels. Even though he was getting on in years [Chiba was 38 years old at the time of *Doberman Cop*’s release], he did hard work [in *Doberman*] doing all sorts of stunts like hanging from the sides of buildings.”

Chiba’s kinetic performance in *Doberman Cop* is supported by Toei regular Hiroki Matsukata as yakuza-turned-show-biz-impresario Hidemori. Matsukata, who passed away in early 2017, was often cast alongside Chiba in tumultuous gang epics like Sadao Nakajima’s 1977 films *Okinawa Yakuza War* (*Okinawa yakuza senso*) and *Yakuza Wars: The Godfather of Japan* (*Yakuza senso: Nihon no don*), as well as Fukasaku’s own *Hokuriku Proxy War*.

Janet Hatta, who plays pop singer Miki, was born in Virginia to a Japanese mother and an American father. After graduating from high school in Japan, she worked as a flight attendant before being scouted as a model by the Shiseido makeup company. Film and TV roles followed, including turns in director Akio Jissoji’s period art film *Life of a Court Lady* (*Asaki yumemishi*, 1974) and Toei’s biker flick *Detonation! 750cc Tribe* (*Bakuhatsum! Nananhan zoku*, 1976) before she married and retired from the limelight in 1981.

Finally, it would be an oversight not to mention the Piranha Army — Toei’s troupe of bit players and wise guys, most of whom turn up in supporting parts throughout Fukasaku’s films from this period — and two of its key members who also shine brightly in *Doberman Cop*: Takuzo Kawatani as beleaguered strip club worker Hiyoshi and Hideo Murota as dirty cop Takamatsu.

*Doberman Cop* premiered in Japanese theaters on July 2, 1977 with a female pro-wrestling film, *Beauty Pair: Red-Hot Youth* (*Byuti peya: Makka na seishun*), assigned as the co-feature. Business was good enough that some consideration was briefly given to turning *Doberman Cop* into a film series, but alas, it was not to be. Toei wanted to cut back on budgets to save up for Fukasaku’s next project.

Right after *Doberman*’s summer release, Fukasaku had to begin preparing his next film, the big-budget swordplay epic *Shogun’s Samurai* (*Yagyū ichizoku no inbo*), which was to be Toei’s New Year’s event film for 1978. Sonny Chiba would put away the pig and the .44



Magnum and appear in one of his most famous roles: legendary swordsman Jubei Yagyu. *Shogun's Samurai* would also mark a major turning point in Fukasaku's career as he finally steered away from the yakuza genre and into period films — including *The Fall of Ako Castle* (aka *Swords of Vengeance, Ako-jo danzetsu*, 1978), *Samurai Reincarnation (Makai tensho*, 1981), and *Legend of Eight Samurai (Satomi hakkenden*, 1983), a direction that had been a long-cherished dream of his.

Kinji Fukasaku died in 2003 at the age of 72, but even in his advanced years, the likes of *Doberman Cop* still held a warm place in his heart, “It was a low budget type of production,” he said. “But I doubt that there’s anyone on the planet who thinks it’s bad to make those sorts of films.”

*Patrick Macias is the author of the book TokyoScope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion. The anime series Urahara is based on his original story.*









## VIDEO KILLED THE MANGA STAR: RESURRECTING DOBERMAN COP

by Tom Mes

What is a cop? A cop is someone who gets paid to uphold the status quo – which in itself does not make for a particularly interesting movie protagonist, let alone an appealing one.

This has not stopped any of the incalculable number of films about cops from getting made. Reality, of course, need not be an obstacle to creating a gripping storyline or a fascinating character. A movie is an hour and a half long, so in order to create such a condensed narrative you can cut out all the boring parts that make up much of your, my and most everyone's time spent in reality.

Now, with cops – and also their inevitable antagonists, robbers – one could argue that since they experience possible life and death situations every day, their lives are more intense to begin with. This assumption forms the first stage in the condensation process (though quite a number of American films give at least some acknowledgement to the actual humdrum routine of police living through the recurring symbol of the donut.)

In this manner, you could limit your portrayal to the cop's involvement in a single criminal case, preferably the search for an unhinged villain, who you then let him pursue to the point of obsession, so that he becomes what they call on video box covers "a cop on the edge." This also conveniently allows you to leave the mundane callings of daily life out of the picture: filing reports, going to the bathroom and so on.

If you were to focus on the robbers, and you happen to be a Japanese filmmaker, you could make a movie about, say, a *chinpira* – the slang term for a juvenile delinquent turned apprentice yakuza. This would typically see the protagonist get slapped about and beaten up, but also pummel other punks with baseball bats, kill his first rival gangster, and lose his virginity, all while wearing loud shirts and screaming a lot. Whereas, in actual life, a *chinpira* spends most of his days making tea and lighting cigarettes for his seniors.

Another, though connected, method is to exaggerate the role of the cop: you instill him with all the virtues of the mythical hero, which is a character who does good by evil means, i.e. the use of violence. You can then conceal this boring business about a status quo behind your protagonist's righteousness and surround him with morally ambiguous or misguided



(though well-intended) colleagues to provide contrast. Finally, remembering that the hero gets to use ‘evil means’, you give him the most powerful handgun in the world, one that can blow a man’s head clean off. And then you have Dirty Harry.

### Horses, Pigs, and Alsations

Let’s keep Dirty Harry in mind as a prototype of the movie cop. Kinji Fukasaku’s *Doberman Cop* (*Doberman deka*, 1977) presents an origin story of sorts, and it does so by applying the framework of another Clint Eastwood cop-hero, the Arizona sheriff from *Coogan’s Bluff* (1968), who saunters into the big bad urban jungle of New York City with a Stetson on his head and cowboy boots on his feet. (While Coogan doesn’t ride a horse across Fifth Avenue, the TV series the film inspired, *McCloud*, leaped at the chance to add this gimmick.) With tattered straw hat and portable piglet, Shinichi Chiba’s country hick version of Joji Kano, the titular Doberman Cop (though, confusingly, his nickname in the film is Tarzan), looks like the antithesis of the character as he appears in the manga, who is leather-clad and chisel-featured and rides a Harley Davidson.

The *Doberman Cop* TV series, which ran for 22 episodes throughout most of the year 1980, restored some of these original qualities, but gimmicked them up with a team-format derived not so much from American cop stories as from Japanese superhero shows: each team member rides a motorcycle in a different colour, while a quartet of – don’t ask why – Alsations serves as mascot/sidekicks. The not quite chisel-featured Toshio Kurosawa (best known for playing Meiko Kaji’s would-be love interest in *Lady Snowblood* [*Shurayuki hime*, 1973]) is cast in the title role, while one of his teammates is played by action diva and Sonny Chiba protégé Etsuko “Sue” Shihomi (the Japan Action Club provided the stunt work on the show and the final third of the holy trinity of 1970s Japanese action, Hiroyuki “Henry” Sanada, guest starred in the series’ pilot).

### Doberman Reborn

Going into the 1980s, Dirty Harry’s moral rectitude served as the ideal template for the heroes of the Reagan-era American action movie. Until Bruce Willis and his dirty undershirts re-injected a mild dose of everyman into the cop hero, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone were basically Clint Eastwood with bigger guns and muscle, taken on superhero-esque proportions. All other narrative elements (corrupt or misguided colleagues, deranged villain, dogged pursuit) were left pretty much in place.

While Japan was locked in an economic and industrial rivalry with the US, these action films, particularly those of Stallone, had a formative influence on a burgeoning sector of the Japanese film industry that was every inch the expression of its era: V-Cinema, or direct-

to-video (DTV) filmmaking. It is here that the Doberman Cop would make his subsequent screen appearance.

Launched in 1989 by the home video division of the Toei studio, V-Cinema’s early years saw a proliferation of action films that all featured the requisite car chases, warehouse shootouts, and stoic alpha-male heroes sporting handguns and bandanas. The very first of these, a movie titled *Crime Hunter* (*Kuraimuhanta - ikari no judan*, 1989, dir: Toshimichi Okawa), gave an early supporting role to the man who would be king of V-Cinema, Riki Takeuchi. It is he who next portrayed the Doberman Cop, in the 1996 production of the same name, directed by Daisuke Gotoh.

The V-Cinema *Doberman Cop* restores the character to its rightful look: dressed head-to-toe in black leather, riding a heavy chopper, and with an ivory-handled .44 Magnum jutting ostentatiously from a shoulder holster. Like the earlier incarnations, though, this film also has an additional framework applied to it, one that is apparent from the opening scene: a hostage situation that has ground to a stalemate between the hostage taker with his victim on the top floor of a suburban house and the police force waiting ineffectually outside. In rides a noisy chopper; close-up of a leather boot that touches the asphalt as the rider descends from his bike: the Doberman Cop enters the scene – if crime is a disease, he’s the leather-clad, shade-wearing, gun-toting cure. Yes, Stallone’s *Cobra* (1986) was clearly the model here, as the similar plot, in which the cop must protect the only surviving witness of a brutal mass murder, goes on to confirm.

Like a true DTV movie, the video box cover makes the V-Cinema *Doberman Cop* look much more alluring than it actually is. There is Riki Takeuchi in the lead, looking mean and cool on his Harley, an image intentionally reminiscent of the poster for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). The taglines tell us, in the katakanized pseudo-English catchphrases so beloved of V-Cinema, that he portrays the “legendary violence hero,” the “hardboiled weapon” of the cult manga. The movie was distributed by Toei, producers of Fukasaku’s version, and produced by Gaga Communications, which delivered Takashi Miike’s flabbergasting *Fudoh: The New Generation* (*Gokudo sengokushi - Fudoh*) the same year. And the screenplay was penned by *Fudoh*’s scriptwriter Toshiyuki Morioka. How could this possibly go wrong, I hear you ask?

Before you head for Ebay or your favourite torrenting resource: it can and does go wrong. Director Daisuke Gotoh is no Takashi Miike or Kinji Fukasaku. He is a frequent director of pink films, which is neither here nor there, but while watching *Doberman Cop*, one quickly wishes he had remained “there.” Like the cover art, the *Cobra*-style introduction of the protagonist creates a promise the film fails to deliver on (even *that* modest a promise).



Instead of following up on the American action template which the film seems to hold up as a model, Gotoh opts to mimic Takeshi Kitano's style of deadpan semi-close-ups, which here only serve to deaden the film's pacing; characters make stupid decisions in order to conveniently set up the next plot point; the final "shocking" revelation [SPOILER: his seemingly misguided-but-well-intended rookie partner did it!] is telegraphed about six scenes before that climactic moment finally, after 75 interminable minutes, arrives. The film then has six more minutes to go, though thankfully this includes the closing credits.

(Those who would accuse me of picking on Daisuke Gotoh, I present you with exhibit B: the year after *Doberman Cop*, the same director massively screwed up another revival of an iconic figure of page and screen, Female Prisoner Scorpion, with the shot-in-California *Scorpion's Revenge*, a.k.a. *Sasori in USA* – the one in which Scorpion is a bland-and-busty suburban interior designer with a bob cut...)

### Boy Band Cop

In Japan's current filmmaking climate, dominated by TV companies and talent agencies that use feature films as vehicles for their manufactured idols *du jour*, it's unlikely that a new *Doberman Cop* adaptation will grace our screens in the near future. Then again, obscure manga and anime characters seemingly forgotten by society at large, but fondly remembered by the forty and fifty-something executives that make the decisions in the current showbiz world, have on more than one occasion provided conveniently pre-formatted templates into which to slot many a young entertainer's burgeoning career: Miike's 2009 *Yatterman*, for example, or the 2013 revamping of *Gatchaman*, better known on our shores (if you happen to be of the same generation as those executives) as *Battle of the Planets*.

And come to think of it, the motorbike-and-black-leather get-up does sound like it was tailor-made to fit any of the countless members of the irrepressible boy band Exile. We've already had the Doberman Cop as a country bumpkin, as a TV-friendly nice guy, and as a scowling pompadoured video star, so who knows; maybe next time we'll see him as a suntanned and mustachioed, oiled-up R&B hunk patrolling the streets of Shibuya?

*Tom Mes is the author of books on Japanese films and filmmakers, including Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike (2006), and Iron Man: The Cinema of Shinya Tsukamoto (2005). With Jasper Sharp he founded and edited MidnightEye.com and wrote The Midnight Eye Guide to New Japanese Film (2004). He has also worked on Japanese films as a scriptwriter and actor, and is currently working on a book about the history of V-Cinema.*







## ABOUT THE TRANSFERS

*Dobberman Cop* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 and with its original mono sound. The film was remastered in high definition and supplied for this release by Toei Company, Ltd.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet produced by: **Marc Walkow**  
Executive Producers: **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer: **James White**  
QC and Proofing: **Nora Mehenni, Marc Walkow**  
Blu-ray and DVD Mastering: **SilverSun**  
Subtitling: **The Engine House**  
Artist: **Chris Malbon**  
Design: **Obviously Creative**

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