How the West Was Won Encyclopedia Article

How the West Was Won

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How the West Was Won

Featuring narration by Spencer Tracy, individual segments directed by Henry Hathaway, John Ford, and George Marshall, a gigantic all-star cast (including Henry Fonda, Karl Malden, Gregory Peck, George Peppard, Debbie Reynolds, Jimmy Stewart, Eli Wallach, John Wayne, Richard Widmark, and Walter Brennan), and an engaging story and thrilling action sequences, MGM's *How the West Was*

James Stewart in a scene from the film *How the West Was Won*.*Won* (1962) is widely considered one of Hollywood's greatest epics. The film episodically tells the story of three generations of the Prescott family, who migrate Westward over a fifty year period during the 19th century. This was the first theatrical release featuring Cinerama, a filming technique which employs three cameras sharing a single shutter in order to replicate the scope of the human eye. The process is far less impressive on TV or video cassette. In theaters, however, the film, much of which was shot on location in various spots throughout the American West, is spectacular. Despite Cinerama's initial popularity, after *How the West Was Won* few films successfully utilized the process, which ultimately resulted in its demise. Nevertheless, *How the West Was Won* remains a classic example of big-budget Hollywood filmmaking at its best.

Further Reading:

Darby, William. *John Ford's Westerns: A Thematic Analysis, with Filmography.* Jefferson, McFarland & Co. Inc., 1996.

Hall, Sheldon. " *How the West Was Won* : History, Spectacle, and the American Mountains." In *The Book of Westerns,* edited by Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye. New York, Continuum, 1996.