The Screen Savor: â€˜The Mild Bunchâ€™

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "WILD HOGS"

It's "City Slickers" on cycles. A foursome of Cincinnati middle-aged males swap the humdrum for the thrum-thrum of their Harleys. The British term for these guys is "BAMBI" (Born Again Middle-Aged Bikers), weekend warriors who go to the large biker gatherings by trucking their bikes, rather than riding them. Ssshâ€”don't tell.

John Travolta, William H. Macy, and Tim Allen star in â€œWild Hogsâ€•

As with most comedies, it's not just the situation, but the situation as filtered through the characters that makes the comic wheels go 'round. Between the computer nerd Dudley (William H. Macy), the henpecked plumber Bobby (Martin Lawrence), the dentist/doctor wannabe Doug (Tim Allen) and the bankrupt leader-of-the-pack Woody (John Travolta), as big on denial as he is on the open road, these Hambone Hogs keep this particular vehicle running on laughs from start to finish.

The plot isn't any more complicated than a scooter: Woody convinces his three friends to take to the highway for a fun-filled cruise to the West Coast. As expected, it's not the destination but the journey, fraught with nasty biker bullies, bird poo and a quasi-closeted highway patrolman (John C. McGinley).

Director Walt Becker ("Van Wilder") utilizes his players well. Although we've seen both Martin Lawrence's slow, beautifully timed takes and heard Tim Allen's dry deliveries before, Becker gives us a physical,

pratfalling William H. Macy who's completely new. But because he's such a wonderful actor, Macy infuses what might have been a two-dimensional nerd with great depth of feeling. When he gazes at Marisa Tomei's Maggie, it's not just an ogleâ€”it's a look that speaks volumes, the searching stare of a lonely man who dares to believe that just this once, he might have a chance at love. Although Travolta plays straight man to the other three, he still shines, giving us the sense that he's growing more comfortable with growing older. And when he takes a moment to teach Macy how to two-step with a girl, it's a wink shared with the audience, a nod to all of his prior filmed dance scenes, including "Saturday Night Fever," "Pulp Fiction" and "Michael." Sure, his moves are slower, but the fact that he's still got them is what counts.

Like the riders, the dialogue speeds along at a decent clip. Though it sports its share of the required comic gross-out moments, the script also throws in the smart funny. More smarts and less stupid would have been even better. Coming from television, writer Brad Copeland ("Arrested Development," "My Name is Earl") may still be working under the TV sitcom 3-jokes-per-page rule. Enjoy, Mr. Copeland, no need to break any speed limitsâ€”sometimes a well-placed line, clever and character-appropriate, can give you as much mileage as wacky fouls flying in the face.

Yes, "Wild Hogs" deliversâ€”I saw it with a full house that roared its approval. However, there is an unsettling homophobic note cruising on the shoulder of this particular highway. For example, an obviously gay man minces on stage, singing "Don't you wish your girlfriend was hot like me â€¦ ", Macy nuzzles up to Travolta twice in order to smell his neck, and the highway patrolman (McGinley) hopes to make a close personal friend with one of the Hogs. It's not acceptance, it's derision. Like the movie's Del Fuegos (read Hell's Angels), sometimes there's just no need to get all that nasty.

Go for the full throttle laughs, the comic performances and the sheer silliness of it all. Oh, and watch your speed when leaving the theater. There's a priceless ending during the credits that you won't want to missâ€”even if it means losing the race out of the parking lot.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: B

Click here to view the movie trailer of â€œWild Hogsâ€•.

Kimberly Gadette can be reached at gadettek@yahoo.com Production Credits: "Wild Hogs" Directed by: Walt Becker Screenplay by: Brad Copeland Cast: Tim Allen, John Travolta, Martin Lawrence, William H. Macy, Ray Liotta, Marisa Tomei, Kevin Durand, Jill Hennessey, Stephen Tobolowsky, John C. McGinley Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 99 minutes Grade: B