

DVD Select: Wheezy rider won't get you there

by Robert_J_Hawkins

OK, show of hands: Who among you contributed to the \$170 million box office take for the comedy "Wild Hogs" (Buena Vista, 1 star)? Come on, don't look so sheepish.

'WILD HOGS' - Martin Lawrence, Tim Allen and John Travolta are wannabe bikers from the suburbs who get into mischief they didn't count on in the family comedy 'Wild Hogs.' CNS Photo courtesy of Lorey Sebastien. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin God, you ought to be embarrassed. Think of what we could have done with that \$170 million - besides buy a Barry Bonds home run baseball.

All I can say is what a beautiful soundtrack of big rock radio tunes harnessed to such a sniveling, embarrassingly flaccid, limp piece of comedy. And I use the word "comedy" only because the throwaway bit at the start of the credits is probably one of the funniest, smartest pieces of satire that I've seen all year in a movie.

But then, most people probably didn't see it originally because they left the theater early or were on their knees retching in agony over how much they'd paid, plus the popcorn and sodas, to be so abused by such big Hollywood names.

"Wild Hogs" is aimed squarely at the aging middle-class male boomer bulge. It is the story of four doughy dudes from Cincinnati who set off for the West Coast on their overpriced Harley-Davidson motorcycles to reclaim their manhood. Yeah, I know what you're thinking but it is not "Deliverance" on wheels. Not nearly as funny as "Deliverance."

Doug (Tim Allen) is a dentist with high cholesterol and a wife and kid who view him more as a revenue-generating doorstop than a flesh-and-blood all-American man. Bobby (Martin Lawrence) is on hiatus from his job as a plumber to write a self-help book. Dudley (William H. Macy) is a klutzy, constipated software programmer. And then there is Woody (John Travolta), broke and getting divorced by his supermodel wife.

My first thought, too, was, how is it that a guy in Cincinnati is married to a supermodel?

This gnat pack dons the leathers and dark shades every Thursday after work and rides like the wind as the "Wild Hogs." They ride right to a bar run by the "American Chopper" guys, Paul Teutul Sr. and Pauly Jr. An OK cameo.

Their so-called road trip is filled with crazy biker-guy antics, fresh air, the open road, bladder jokes and homophobic gay jokes. Lots of gay jokes. The biggest joke of all is the periodic appearance at inopportune moments by the gay-butched motorcycle cop played by John McGinley, who plays it just like his Dr. Perry Cox on "Scrubs," except for the badge and the gleaming salivating for human ham hocks.

The "Wild Hogs" find real trouble when they stop in a remote biker bar owned by real tough guys called the Del Fuegos. And I, too, am sorry to see the name and memory of a decent '80s garage rock band put to such sorry use. And not one of their tunes (Why not "Don't Run Wild" guys?) on the soundtrack.

The leader of the biker gang is Jack and we know he's a bad dude because he's played by certified squinty-eyed tough guy Ray Liotta and he has crappy prison tattoos all over his body. I almost buy the tough guy bit until Jack smacks a particularly tall and dopey member of the gang who is questioning his orders. He turns to the motley crew of scraggly ex-lifers and - squinting - says "Any other naysayers?"

Naysayers?

Squishy little geeks in nerd comedies don't even use the word "naysayers." Nobody uses the word "naysayers" - except maybe lazy and tone-deaf Hollywood comedy scriptwriters.

Well, savvy Jack picks up on the fact that the Wild Hogs are wannabe toads and humiliates them almost to the point where the audience would start feeling they were getting some vengeance for the price of their ticket. Oh, this is where the "Deliverance" jokes come in, too.

Stuff happens. I won't bore you with the details but the Del Fuegos are angry in pursuit of the Wild Hogs. Even the naysayers among them.

There's a showdown in a quaint little town called Madrid where the annual Chili Festival is going on and Marisa Tomei is the owner of the local cafe but she's expressly forbidden to say much of anything. Mostly she, inexplicably, makes goo-goo eyes at Dudley. I suspect they were paying her by the word and being an Oscar winner, her fee must be quite high for a Disney budget. So, the goo-goo eyes.

At any rate, if I had to choose the worst performance among the four main stars, I'd have to go with Travolta. Macy is always good. Lawrence doesn't really act, never has. And Allen just dredges up his old TV

stuff and puts on a new outfit. But Travolta is painfully unprepared and woefully over the top. His performance brings out the naysayer in all movie fans.

The Hogs had a motto for their trip "Whenever, wherever and whatever."

And I'm like, yeah, whatever.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Vacancy" (Sony, 2 stars) Two rules to protect yourself from ending up as the main characters in a horror film. 1. Have the car completely checked out before you start on your journey along rural roads. 2. If you must stay some place, and the creepy motel with the even creepier desk clerk is your only choice, throw a brick at the local police car. A night in jail is better than what lies ahead at the Pinewood Motel.

David (Luke Wilson) and Amy (Kate Beckinsale) never read the manual - and now they are scrambling for their lives. Despite the shabby state of the motel, despite the goon behind the check-in desk, despite the screams they heard as they checked in, despite ... what morons. By the time they figure out that the snuff films in their (creepy) motel room are former guests, and that the place is wired up to the whazoo with recording equipment, they are deep into their own reality survival show. Ladies and gentlemen start your screams.

"Fracture" (New Line, 2 stars) Ryan Gosling is an assistant D.A. who takes on what looks like an open-and-shut case in which a husband (Anthony Hopkins) shoots his wife after catching her in an affair with a police detective. Not so fast. Of course there are complications, twists and one ho-hum love affair between Gosling and his boss (Rosamund Pike). Watching Gosling and Hopkins match wits is worth it all.

"The Lookout" (Buena Vista, 2 1/2 stars) Chris Pratt (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) pulls a foolish high school stunt and ends up with a severe brain injury, short-term memory loss and a future as the night cleanup guy at the local bank. A gang with plans to rob that bank lures Chris into the fold and while he buys into the idea at first, he comes to realize that he must do the right thing - if he can only remember what it is he's supposed to do. Decent dramatic flair.

"And God Grew Tired of Us" (Sony, 3 stars) The amazing, inspirational story of four boys who were forced to flee violence-plagued Sudan in a harrowing journey that leads to America and a new life. Nicole Kidman narrates this documentary which earned Grand Jury and Audience awards at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival.

More documentaries: "White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (HBO Video) Fourteen survivors recall the horror. "9/11 Mysteries, Part 1: Demolition" (Disinformation Co.) A look at the engineering and physics that could result in the collapse of the World Trade Center towers. More civil war, more refugees, only this time it is musicians, not children, in "Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars" (Docurama), on tour of the U.S. this summer. Documentary on an American masterpiece "Les Paul: Chasing Sound."

And the rest: The ironic-hip "Adult Swim" animated dud "Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film For Theaters." The muddy Australian crime thriller "Murderous Intent" (aka "Like Minds") with Toni Collette. A rare writer-director gem from David Lynch, "Inland Empire," starring his favorite muse Laura Dern.

IT CAME FROM TV

Why should you pick up season two of "Dynasty" (Paramount/CBS)? Because Joan Collins joined the show as Crystal Carrington's (Linda Evans) nemesis and nobody puts the nasty in "Dynasty" like she does. The original one-arm guy is pursued in season one, volume one of "The Fugitive" by David Janssen as Dr. Richard Kimble.

FROM THE VAULTS

"Taxi Driver: Limited Collector's Edition" (Sony, 1976) Robert ('You talkin' to me?') De Niro gave us one of the movie world's most memorable characters in the unstable taxi driver Travis Bickle. Jodie Foster was amazing as Iris, the 12-year-old hooker (she was 13) and Harvey Keitel as her pimp was evil. The DVD includes an introduction by director Martin Scorsese; a documentary that explores the movies, actors and film-makers influenced by the film; a making-of documentary; and a look at the New York City locations used then and as they appear now.

"The Dark Crystal" (Sony, 1982) The age of chaos begins anew. The damaged crystal has enabled the Skekses to run amok but the convergence of the three suns is near and the crystal must be healed, else their rule lasts forever and darkness reigns. Oh, the trials and tribulations that the late-Jim Henson and David O'Dell conjured. This two-disc 15th anniversary edition comes with new interviews with O'Dell and Henson heir and son, David, among others.

"Labyrinth" (Sony, 1986) This one is called an anniversary edition too. Sarah (Jennifer Connelly) makes the wrong wish and her baby brother ends up in the possession of the Goblin King Jareth (David Bowie). Sarah must complete the king's labyrinth in 13 hours or lose the kid brother. New interviews with actor Brian Henson, executive producer George Lucas, and many others are included in two hours of extras.

"The Shakespeare Collection" (Warner) Four well-turned interpretations of the master: Kenneth Branagh's "Hamlet" (1996, 2 discs), James Cagney and Olivia de Havilland in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (1935), Laurence Olivier and Maggie Smith in "Othello" (1965) and the George Cukor-directed "Romeo and Juliet" (1936). A handsome Bard-in-a-box set.

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