

Movie Review: 'Hot Rod'

by Lee Grant

"Hot Rod" is a cinematic shot of silliness, a simplistic speck at barely more than 80 minutes. You could do worse - "I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry" or "License to Wed," for instance - than spend a spell with winsome Andy Samberg.

'HOT ROD' - Andy Samberg plays hard-riding stuntman Rod Kimble in the comedy 'Hot Rod.' CNS Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) The rudimentary plot of "Hot Rod" (shot in Vancouver, B.C., on a skimpy budget) focuses on an immature, small-town guy named Rod, with a moped and ambitions to be a stuntman. He seeks to follow the path of his dad, who died apparently while toiling as a test rider for Evel Knievel.

Isla Fisher, with a crush on stuntman wannabe Samberg, is a refreshing "Hot Rod" presence.

Samberg, as "Hot" Rod Kimble, devises his most ambitious Evel Knievel-like jump yet.

He's also dealing with a nasty stepfather (Ian McShane of TV's "Deadwood") and a doting mom (Oscar-winner Sissy Spacek, a long way from "Coal Miner's Daughter").

McShane needs a heart transplant and Samberg wants to get him one by winning \$50,000 for a huge jump over 15 school buses. That way, when his stepdad is better, he can whip him in a fight and gain the respect for which he yearns.

There is slapstick galore as jumps over a public pool, milk trucks and a trailer are bungled. Funny highlight: After one stunt failure, Samberg heads to his "quiet place," chugs booze, smokes, and dances like Kevin Bacon in "Footloose," complete with cartwheels. Then comes a fall down a mountain that lasts, seemingly, forever.

Fisher (from "Wedding Crashers") is an island of sanity in a farcical storm, cute and coolheaded. At one point, Samberg receives mouth-to-mouth resuscitation from her and, awakening, wonders to his nerdy stepbrother (Taccone), "Did it look a little like we were making out?"

Not everything works, particularly an extended "cool beans" routine with Taccone that reeks of an inside joke. They brought it outside, unfortunately.

A Paramount Pictures release. Director: Akiva Schaffer. Writer: Pam Brady. Cast: Andy Samberg, Jorma Taccone, Bill Hader, Danny R. McBride, Isla Fisher, Sissy Spacek, Ian McShane. Rated PG-13. Running time: 88 minutes. 2 1/2 stars.

