

## Talking dogs equal family fun in upscale 'Chihuahua'

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### BEVERLY HILLS CHIHUAHUA (Rated PG)

Looking at the lineup of movies released in recent weeks, the family film seems as rare as healthy eating at a fast-food joint. With the Disney imprimatur on a talking dog story, it's no wonder that "Beverly Hills Chihuahua" is not an art-house flick catering to a snobbish adult crowd.

Ironically enough, snobbery is very much a theme to this family-oriented entertainment, given how the absurdly ostentatious behavior of wealthy elites who lavish fortune on household pets is mocked as well as vicariously envied. Even though the vacuous Paris Hilton and her celebrity ilk are fortunately not seen, they nicely serve as role models for certain characters.

The opening of "Beverly Hills Chihuahua" sets the stage for the pretentious, showy display of grandiose wealth when pampered Chihuahua Chloe (voiced by Drew Barrymore) lounges around the pool of her Beverly Hills mansion, wearing a diamond necklace and booties. Her owner, Viv (Jamie Lee Curtis), is a cosmetics tycoon who showers attention on the spoiled pooch, who happens to have a social calendar that rivals that of a socialite.

Parading along swank Rodeo Drive, Chloe visits an exclusive dog grooming parlor and goes shopping for new jewelry. It's wretched excess to the extreme, which frankly doesn't play very well. But then, it's the ultimate setup for the pooch's inevitable comeuppance.

The dog's life takes a new twist when Viv must depart suddenly for an overseas trip, and as a result Chloe is left in the hands of Viv's selfish, irresponsible niece Rachel (Piper Perabo), who just wants to party with her empty-headed friends. When her pals decide to go on a road trip to Baja California, Rachel decides to bring Chloe along, with little intention of doing more than minimal babysitting.

Distracted by beach parties, Rachel doesn't notice that Chloe is kidnapped by criminals who run a dog-fighting ring in Mexico City. Unable to get much help from the police or her friends, Rachel enlists the aid of Viv's Mexican landscaper Sam (Manolo Cardona), owner of a rambunctious Chihuahua named Papi (voiced by George Lopez) who has a major crush on Chloe.

The search for the missing Chloe takes many detours through the Mexican countryside, as Sam and Rachel try to pick up the trail with the help of Papi. Meanwhile, Chloe ends up as a coming attraction at a dog-fighting show where she will be forced to fight the monstrous Doberman Diablo (voiced by Edward James Olmos).

Before being turned into a chew toy by Diablo, Chloe is rescued by German Shepherd Delgado (Andy Garcia), a former police dog who turned in his badge after a career-ending disability. Still, Delgado is a formidable force, though he has reservations about the loquacious Chloe becoming his sidekick in an effort to return to the United States.

Talking animals own this movie, and as such, their dialog is more substantial than that of the humans who are almost marginalized. That's why the clever barbs and insults, though limited in supply, come from the bickering four-legged characters. Teamed as conniving con artists, a thieving rodent (voiced by Cheech Marin) and his iguana buddy make a fine mess of things. One of the big scenes involves Chloe and Delgado being rescued by an army of feral Chihuahuas when the domesticated pair faces immediate danger from a pack of mountain lions.

Notwithstanding the backdrop of Southern California overindulgence, "Beverly Hills Chihuahua" has a certain amount of charm, even though overall the film is rather bland and passably amusing.

However, keep in mind that the target audience is the one that still needs a ride from mom and dad to the local cinema. For a family outing, it's not a bad deal.

#### DVD RELEASE UPDATE

"Joy Ride," starring heartthrob Paul Walker, was one of those popcorn thriller movies that capture the attention of teenagers in droves. It remains to be seen whether "Joy Ride 2: Dead Ahead" will do the same, considering it's a video release available only in an unrated version. Hey, that's a nifty marketing tool for the under-18 crowd.

A white-knuckle thrill ride awaits four young travelers on their way to Las Vegas when their car breaks down in a remote area of the sweltering desert. They "borrow" a car from a vacant home with plans to return it, except the owner is a sadistic truck driver going by the CB-handle "Rusty Nail" (the same deranged person from the original film).

Well, you can imagine what happens to the teens, including Nicki Aycox and Nick Zano, when the mad trucker, playing increasingly ruthless mind games, hunts them down with his blood-soaked 18-wheeler. Let's just say it is not pretty.

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