

Raunchy teen comedy takes many detours in 'Sex Drive'

Contributed by Tim Riley
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SEX DRIVE (Rated R)

For some unknown reason, this is not the week for family films, with "Max Payne" coming closest with its PG-13 rating. But instead of getting invited to a screening for that film, I was treated to the absurd delight of another teen sex comedy, one that held promise for offending a good number of people.

"Sex Drive" did not disappoint for its randy misadventures and raunchy escapades into the mysterious world of teens gone wild. This one is rated R for good reasons, namely for strong crude and sexual content, among other things.

The aptly named "Sex Drive" most fittingly has dual meaning. It telegraphs the urgency of raging male hormones and conjures up the vision of a road trip that has much to do with sex. As raucous and extreme as it often gets "Sex Drive" has irresistible appeal for the essential charm of its leading characters.

Eighteen-year-old Ian Lafferty (Josh Zuckerman) believes that his biggest problem in life is that he's about to start college as a virgin. Never mind the humiliating job he has at Senor Donut, which often requires that he wear a ridiculous costume while handing out fliers at the mall.

Taunted mercilessly by his obnoxious, cocksure older brother Rex (James Marsden), Ian even loses out in the romance department to his 14-year-old younger brother. The girl of his dreams is his longtime "best friend" Felicia (Amanda Crew), who seems reluctant to mess up a perfectly good relationship with any sort of physical entanglement.

Besides, Felicia is inexplicably attracted to Ian's good buddy Lance (Clark Duke), a pudgy, nerdy guy who has such an abundance of self-confidence that he's become the unlikeliest chick magnet. Strangely enough, there's hardly any female that Lance can't seduce.

Meanwhile, the sexually repressed Ian resorts to the Internet for dates. Passing himself off as a football stud, Ian hooks up online with Ms. Tasty (Katrina Bowden), a flaming hot blonde. Though the provocative cheerleader offers the promise of hot sex, the one tiny catch is that Ian must drive 500 miles from Chicago to Knoxville to consummate the deal.

Egged on by his pal Lance, Ian takes a huge risk in stealing his macho brother's prized vintage 1969 Pontiac GTO for the lengthy road trip. Felicia decides to tag along with the two guys for what is obviously a bad idea.

In the predictable manner of other recent teen adventures on the road, seen in movies like "Road Trip" and "Eurotrip," the comedy of "Sex Drive" also derives inspiration from the "American Pie" franchise. As a matter of fact, the sexual bravado of Ian's older brother Rick has much in common with party animal Stifler.

The focal point of the story is the planned eight-hour drive that turns into a three-day marathon as the trio loses its way on scenic back roads detours. Car trouble is the least of their problems.

At a rest stop, Lance's libido gets the better of him as he hooks up with an oversexed girl who lives in a trailer with her white trash parents. What happens during this romantic liaison is probably the film's crudest moment. But then things get extremely funny when Lance, pursued by an angry boyfriend, flees naked into the cornfields while chained to a brass bed's headboard.

When the GTO breaks down, they detour to an Amish farm, where the sarcastic Ezekiel (Seth Green), who once spent some time in the outside world, applies his auto mechanic skills to fix the car.

Other road trip problems include an unfortunate encounter in a gas station's bathroom. A mishap on the highway leads to a stint in jail, where the kids face the expected perils from close confinement with hardened criminals.

There's a strange interlude at a roadside carnival, where Ian is pressed into making a fateful abstinence pledge on a stage while becoming sexually aroused by the sight of the dancers disrobing behind the scenes.

Whether Ms. Tasty lives up to her Internet profile is best left to be discovered. The journey is of greater consequence than the destination.

Along the way, through all the trials of mayhem and misadventure, the trio of Ian, Felicia and Lance emerge as characters with substance, displaying genuine emotion and feelings.

"Sex Drive" turns out to be much more than sophomoric pranks and simple titillation. Still, for a teen comedy, this film is at turns outrageously hilarious and sweetly funny, even when the broader caricatures intrude.

DVD RELEASE UPDATE

Not to be confused with the 007 franchise, the original "Casino Royale" was a classic spoof of the secret agent genre. Made in 1967, it followed several of the Sean Connery films.

Now, "Casino Royale: Collector's Edition" arrives on DVD just in time to celebrate the coming 53rd (or so it seems) installment of a James Bond film, "Quantum of Solace";

Starring the debonair David Niven as the world famous secret agent, "Casino Royale" recruited several agents to also play James Bond, among them the unlikely Woody Allen. Best of all, the sultry original Bond girl Ursula Andress stars as the sexy Vesper Lynd. The soundtrack features great music composed by Burt Bacharach.

On the TV front, another great series has been released for the first time on DVD. "Nash Bridges: The First Season" revisits adrenaline-fueled adventures of a smart-aleck San Francisco detective, dealing with two ex-wives, a rambunctious teen daughter and a partner (Cheech Marin) who is often scheming for some get-rich-quick fix. This is a TV series worth a second look.

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