

'Hooper' is formula with new twist

By Peg Sheldrick

"Hooper" is a show for people who like a little movie with their action.

Hal Needham, a stunt man and stunt coordinator, directed Burt Reynolds, a former stuntman, in this tribute to that eccentric and suicidal breed of folk who risk life and limb to set moviegoers' pulses pounding. The film doesn't have much to offer fans of great acting or lovers of deep plots, but it does provide an interesting look at the world of Sonny Hooper (Reynolds), the self-proclaimed king of the stunt men.

movie review

Hooper's greatest pride is that he "never turned down a gag (stunt)." That should give you an idea of his personality. As in "Smokey and the Bandit," our hero is a charming but reckless sort, bereft of any respect for authority, who can't resist a challenge.

New elements

Once again, the love interest is Sally Field. And once again pranks, brawls and crashes abound. But some new elements have been added to the formula that made "Bandit" so popular.

The wild chases and spectacular wrecks all are part of the film Hooper is working on, "The Spy Who Laughed at Danger." The movie-within-a movie device allows several incredible gags as well as an amusing send-up of the Bond brand of action-adventure flick.

Hooper, as stunt coordinator, must cope with an egomaniacal director with a heart of celluloid and a new kid in town destined to take over as stunt king (Robert Klein and Jan-Michael Vincent), as well as the knowledge

that his aging body won't take too many more jolts. All of this gives "Hooper" more substance than "Bandit" had.

Punishing lifestyle

Though it doesn't indulge in the black comedy and cynicism of Reynolds' other recent film, "The End," the film does pause occasionally to ponder the whys and wherefores of Sonny's wild life. The pauses aren't long; the story never gets heavy. But the punishing physical aspects of running the gags are emphasized as much as the thrills.

The viewer wonders why anyone would go into stunt work. It can't be for the money — for a mere \$50,000 Hooper consents to a gag that will probably kill him. (You can win more on "Name That Tune" and never lift a finger.) And Hooper scorns any pretensions to art, so his stunts are not done for the love of the cinema.

Why do it?

The film never really explains why Hooper and his friends do what they do. Chances are they can't explain it themselves. "Hooper" isn't really a message picture or a psychological study. It's just a picture by stunt folk about stunt folk.

Action lovers aren't the only ones who will enjoy the film. Anyone in the mood for a lighthearted romp behind the scenes in Tinsel Town will find "Hooper" a pleasant way to pass an hour or two. The gags don't lose their impact just because you can see the man hit the air bag.

For his spectacular finale, director Needham found a small town slated for demolition for industrial reasons and did the job himself. He was thorough, to say the least. The PG rating is for the raunchy language, though, because the stunts are bloodless. "Hooper" is currently playing at the Douglas 3 Theatre Complex.

UNL connection

Incidentally, local theater fans will note that the supporting cast includes Hal Floyd, a member of the UNL theatre department faculty who directed last year's Dallas Award-winning "Hot L Baltimore." Floyd plays Cliff, the mechanic who juices up Hooper's cars.



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