

'Oxford' features clean entertainment

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NITPICKING DEPARTMENT: In the opening scenes of "Oxford Blues" lead character Nick D'Angelo is driving through the streets of Oxford, England, for the first time. The skies above are consistently gray, as is common in merry old England most of the year. Then, just when D'Angelo turns

down the street leading to Oriel College, suddenly there's a two-second shot of bright, blue sky, followed the next second by more gray.

That mistake stands out because it is the only inconsistent fact about "Oxford Blues." For the rest of its story, it is straight, half-hearted comedy that actually has a pretty good love story as well.

That's not to say "Oxford Blues" will be in line for any awards. While it's one of the few college films around that concentrates on some of its characters and shies from the usual offensive jokes and pranks, it also offers

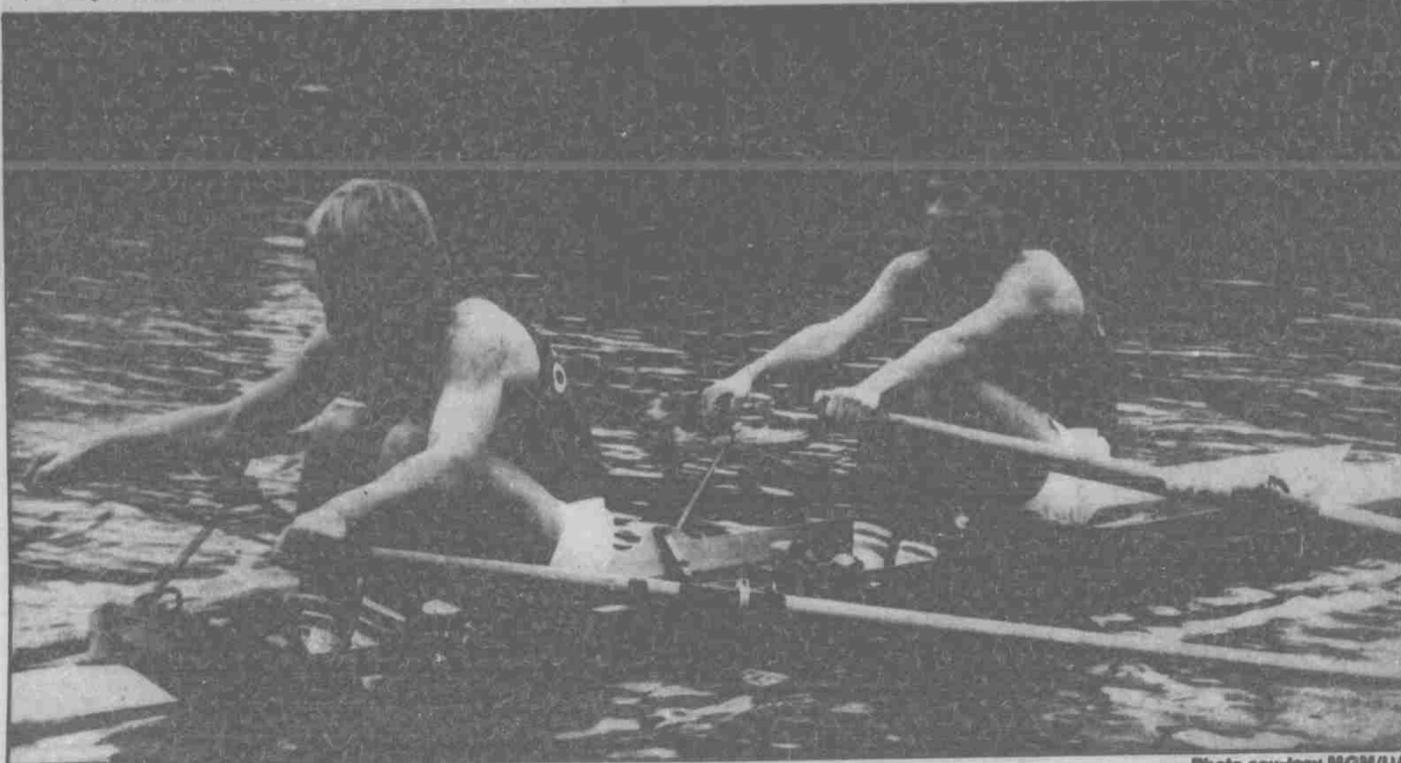


Photo courtesy MGM/UA

Nick (Rob Lowe) trains for the Oriel rowing squad in "Oxford Blues."

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nothing really solid and memorable either. It only works as an hour-and-a-half of clean entertainment.

"Oxford Blues" stars Rob Lowe, a teenage heartthrob in-the-making who previously smiled his way through the movie "Class" as the outgoing senior whose mother falls for his roommate. At times, he could still be playing the same role, as Nick is an arrogant, self-sure conman, but he also doubles as the star of the Nevada-Las Vegas crew team.

His problem stems from an English lady who shows up on the covers of Rolling Stone and other magazines. (We're never really told what she does and why Rolling Stone is so interested in her.)

Nick's fascination with Lady Victoria (Amanda Pays), leads him to sneak his way into Oxford through computer piracy and, after a night of hot streaks both on and off the gambling floors of Vegas with a divorcee, he also gets the money to go.

But once in Oxford, Nick finds Victoria already engaged to respected Adonis, who is also the top crewman at the university.

The story gets progressively better once Nick takes his American ways and language to the task with the Oxford upperclass and crew team. His fascination with Victoria never subsides even though a fellow Yankee, Rona Ally Sheedy, develops an equally strong feeling for him.

Sheedy ("War Games" and "Bad Boys") and Lowe are both very good in their roles, but that's not surprising. What is surprising, is that their roles are more than just cheap teen jokes and smart-ass rebellion. Writer-Director Robert Boris gives some depth and range to both roles, though the movie's sudden inconclusive ending aborts further exploration of the character's relationship.

The rest of the supporting cast ranges from fine to boring, but the bit players are almost all excellent, and the script is written so that one of them always pops up just in time for some comic relief.

Michael Gough invokes memories of John Gielgoud's performance in "Arthur" as the school's stuffy but sarcastic dean. Hugh Morton, as Lady Victoria's butler, and Aubrey Morris also excel in very short cameos.

"Oxford" also gets in its shots of American patriotism as several films this year ("Red Dawn," "Moscow on the Hudson") have done. Lowe and Julian Sands, as Victoria's boyfriend Colin, debate Colin's point that "the decline of Western civilization began when the British left the American colonies to themselves." It's a short debate, won easily by Colin, but it raises some interesting points of view of how others might see us.

"Oxford Blues" is showing at the Plaza Four.

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