

FILM REVIEWS

Slipstream

Directed by David Acoma; Screenplay by Bill Fruet, from a story by David Acoma; Cinematography by Marc Champion; Edited by Tony Lower; Music by Brian Aherne. Cast: Luke Askew, Patti Oatman, Scott Hylands, Eli Rill, Debbie Peck, Debbie Rotenberg, Danny Friedman. Distributed by Cinepix. Running Time: 94 minutes.

Ostensibly intended as a paean to youth, or at least as a patronising celebration of the 'hippie' way of life, David Acoma's "Slipstream" actually presents young people in a very unfavourable light, as either stupid or sexist, or both; with some justification, perhaps, but doubtless unintentionally. The minimally involving plot revolves around a popular disk jockey and his failure to come to grips with a materialist society; we also witness his relationship with a young woman, an affair that wavers unsteadily between mutual acquiescence and complete domination on his part. We realise that they are supposed to be in love because there is a coyly lyrical interlude when they go horseback riding in the buff. (Hats off to Acoma, though, for showing Luke Askew in a prolonged frontal nude shot, thereby negating any cries of exploitation which might have otherwise heralded the scenes involving Patti Oatman's naked body.) The communal house Cathy (Ms. Oatman) leaves to take up with Mike (Mr. Askew), the deejay, is seen as a veritable bastion of male chauvinism: the women are told to clean up the place whilst the men sit around stoned or drinking beer, watching television. Were the film more perceptively written (and it is a disappointment to discover that Bill Fruet is responsible for the witless scenario), one might conceivably accept these communards as examples of the folly of youth-worshipping; that there really is no such simplistic thing as a generation gap, merely intelligent people and stupid people, some old, some young, some with long hair, some with short. But, unfortunately, they fit in all too easily with the other sketchily developed parts to be taken as anything

other than they appear.

The producers of "Slipstream" obviously have their eyes set on the American market, for the film, although unconscionably sloppy in places, has a superficial gloss alien to the usually realistic and grainy look of most Canadian films attempting to be serious, and two of the leading actors (Askew and Scott Hylands) are from south of the border. If one hasn't been there, or cannot read out of focus license plates on moving cars, it comes as an unfortunate surprise to realise that "Slipstream" was filmed in Alberta, with financial assistance from the C.F.D.C. To be fair to Acoma, though, the film is occasionally striking visually, but even then, only in as far as his artful compositional sense is concerned. All the pretty pictures might mean something if their appeal weren't vitiated by sluggish and predictable camera motion (usually a pan from A to B) and, more damagingly, atrocious editing. Time and again, the audience is left to ponder the mystery of the prairies as Acoma leaves his camera pointing at a set or location long since deserted by the players. Worse still are the many fade-ins and -outs, usually accompanied by meaninglessly portentous music. Nothing much happens in "Slipstream" (beyond the plentiful and obligatory lens-flaring, and even some gratuitous use of yellow filters), and when it does, one couldn't care less. Ultimately, it IS a film suitable for youths, but only those very much younger than the eighteen years required by the Ontario censors.

A harsh judgement, perhaps, but certainly not unreasonable. To praise a film simply because it is Canadian IS unreasonable, for that is carrying nationalism to a level of jingoistic absurdity. "Slipstream" is a bad film with pitifully little to offer an intelligent audience, and to sanction a work such as this merely because it was made in one's own country is to condone the making of mediocre movies, a state of affairs which would finally be extremely unhealthy for the Canadian film industry.

Montague Smith

Taureau

— written and directed by Clément Perron; photography by Georges Dufaux; editing by Pierre Lemelin; Joseph Champagne did the sound, Jean Cosineau did the music for this National Film Board production, Marc Beaudet, producer. Starring André Melançon, Monique Lepage, Michèle Magny, Louise Portal, Marcel Sabourin. Canadian distributor: France Film.

Clément Perron wrote the screenplay for **Mon Oncle Antoine**; as directed by Claude Jutra, that nostalgic, tender, story of a boy's greening in the Québec countryside was certainly the hit of 1971 in Canadian films.

Now Clément Perron has written and directed **Taureau**. This seems to English Canada to be his directorial debut and just his second feature film script. But he is hardly an inexperienced newcomer. He has directed, written, or produced scripts for almost forty films since he joined the National Film Board in 1957. His background includes studying at the Sorbonne and the Institute of Filmography after graduating from Laval, and in 1968 he was an executive producer for French Production at the NFB, responsible for works like Jean Pierre Lefebvre's **Jusqu'au Coeur**. Unfortunately, since French Unit Productions are not frequently seen in English-speaking Canada, Perron's name is still new to many.

However, the people of Perron's Québec are becoming familiar to Canadians from Victoria to Saskatoon to Sackville, through his scripts. In **Mon Oncle Antoine** they are seen half-tolerantly through the eyes of a boy, as slightly mysterious, mad, lovable monsters. In **Taureau** the viewpoint darkens to that of an alienated adolescent, and the people appear more malicious, hypocritical, cruel and foolish. Considering the stereotypes born in English-Canadian minds with every movie, I shudder to think of the results when Perron interprets the townspeople of his past in his next screenplay, in which he's promised to describe the local resistance to World War II conscription, undoubtedly centering the conflict on Taureau's dead father, seen memorialized in a photograph in his World War II uniform in **Taureau**.

Taureau, "the bull," is a great, big-chested, heavy, hairy fellow whose formidable sexuality is both held in check by his simpleness, and yet made



Monique Lepage (*La Gilbert*)



André Melançon (*Taureau*)



Louise Portal (*Gigi*)

photo: NFB

more threatening by the possibility of his loss of control. The script at least indicates that this is what the villagers feel. He is played, however, rather sadly and passively by fellow film-maker André Melançon, and since it is on the pivot of his sexual strength the plot must turn, his lack of thrust and unthreatening portrayal somewhat weaken the core of the story.

Maybe I'm wrong, but I felt *Taureau* should represent mindless, magnetic, permanently adolescent sex, all drive and need, a tortured D. H. Lawrence beast, primitive and urgent, in order to focus the conflict of the film. Instead, Melançon's *Taureau* is as lovable as a castrated St. Bernard, and the beaky, breasty mothers and daughters of the town are clearly the dangerous people. Since *Taureau* is shown weak and vulnerable, the contest is unfair. Thus the moralizing is done by Perron and not left up to the audience. Does he think we'd side with the townspeople if he didn't victimize *Taureau*? Perhaps he just feels that all that *Taureau* is, is inevitably victimized because it is vulnerable.

Although some of Perron's scenes need directorial discipline, and the general shape of the film is scattered and loose, some sequences are real jewels. One involves *Taureau*'s mother and sister, a remarkable pair forced by

poverty to enjoy prostitution after the death of his father. The sequence starts gaily with the sound of bursting giggles of unsuppressable merriment. Through a lovely long shot we see the two luscious ladies staggering about behind their little house, trying to attach their flimsy washing to the frisky clothesline. The daughter impudently exposes her breasts with defiant humor to the staring village simpleton. But the shot continues and we follow the two females inside their house, where the sequence develops a sensitive exposure of the underlying tragedy of their lives. We see their tenderness for each other, their strong and desperate love. Seldom in any film is the contact between mother and daughter made so poignantly, so effectively. This rich, revealing sequence is beautifully acted by Monique Lepage as the mother, and ably supported by Louise Portal as *Gigi* the daughter, in her first feature film role. This scene provides the kind of painful joy to the constant movie-goer that rewards those endless hours spent sitting and seeing in darkened theatres, everywhere.

Taureau is a good film, despite some awkward intercutting, protracted tensions that start to slip, and unnecessary or underdeveloped characters. It has life. It has feeling. And above all it is beautifully sensual in a pleasantly adolescent sense: lots of soft flesh, feathers,

hair, breasts, taut nipples. In fact, the cruel excitement of sex permeates the film just as it does an adolescent's life.

But adolescence is hard to handle; and if a romantically adolescent attitude to some extent weakens this film, it also proves the truism: it's hard to grow up. It's difficult to accept that growing up may mean becoming like the townspeople. Or that the inevitable result of satisfying male sexual needs in a Catholic community leads to certain rigid roles for women. Perron tries to show the anguish and joy of sex, the thrill of flesh, but he cannot solve its consequences: the problem of what happens to a female in rural Québec as a result of sex. Thus he destroys his *Taureau* before love can fade or *Taureau*'s lovely girl grow into a village woman who may convert him into a normal member of the community — another lusty hypocrite.

The film is marvellously, thoroughly, soaked in an adolescent metaphor, with an adolescent solution offered to a romantic and terrifying adolescent plot. The implication about the maturity of the townspeople cannot be missed. I have a feeling that as he continues to write, Perron's filmscripts will provide a most remarkable chronicle of rural Québec.

Natalie Edwards