

Reed, the patient, understanding cop, wants to solve the situation as peacefully as possible. An overzealous plain clothes officer (Paul Kosto) would just as soon use brutish SWAT-tactics, and the crowd that gathers only wants to see blood, anybody's blood.

Collinson's style lacks subtlety. The police, except Reed are portrayed as trigger-happy gunslingers. The crowd, one aspect that's overdone makes asinine comments like "where is Telly Savalas" thinking it's a television shoot, and orders snacks as the drama drags on. It's all so heavy-handed. But when Raymond Burr, as the corrupt commissioner and paid flunky of Mr. Big, pops in on the siege scene dressed all in black, that's too much. The "oh-nos" are audible.

Directors, too often, resort to the flashback in narratives but here, not only would flashbacks be ideal, they are essential. We never really get a feeling for the characters we're dealing with, especially Janie and Frank, who are hold up in the cabana. Why did Frank leave for so long? Did he really expect Janie to hang around for him? Why did she go off with Mr. Lotta Bucks? Was she attracted by \$\$\$\$ only? During the siege, she pleads with Frank and tells him she still loves him, but does she mean it? And if she does, why?

Susan George has so little material to work with the only thing she can do is look puffy and terrified, and sob on cue. It's not a terrific performance but it's like the Olivia Newton-John role in *Grease*, I'm not sure any actress could do much better.

Stephen McHattie, who did a splendid job in the TV James Dean Portrait and made less of a splash in *Grey Lady Down*, does remarkably well with the typical stereotyped-crazy-man role. He fluctuates nicely between the irrational ravings of a bonafide madman and the fuzzy bewilderment of a youth trapped in a situation he doesn't fully comprehend. McHattie keeps the built-in histrionics of the part in check.

The other performers do okay with one-dimensional characterizations but special attention has to be drawn to Donald Pleasance, who's appearing in

anything that remotely resembles a Canadian film. Pleasance contributes one of the nuttiest pieces of overacting I've ever seen on film. He plays the town doctor who gives his two-cents worth concerning Frank's head injury and explains why he's not responsible. Shabbily dressed to look like a cousin of Columbo, Pleasance does the most amazing things with his lips and a cigarette. It's as though he's mugging for the camera and Collinson hasn't noticed — it's difficult to believe he ordered this. Even when he's in the background, Pleasance appears to be doing a cross between Inspector Clouzot and Claude Chabrol. While he could be accused of blatant overacting, I prefer to think of it as a witty performance by an astute actor who recognizes the fact that he's in a stinker and wishes to surface with his career in tact.

Even though David Pursall and Jack Seddon's screenplay fails to appeal to the intellect, *Tomorrow Never Comes* is a visually impressive film. François Protat's cinematography conveys both the heat of the situation and the heat of the day, a feat which should not be underestimated considering the entire shoot was plagued with numerous problems, including inclimate weather, from beginning to end.

Lee Rolfe

## Peter Carter's **HIGH BALLIN'**

d. Peter Carter, asst. d. Tony Thatcher, sc. Paul Edwards, ph. Rene Verzier, sp. ph. effects Richard Helmer, sup. ed. Eric Wrate, sd. Jim Hopkins, sd. ed. Douglas Branton, a.d. Claude Bonnière, m. Paul Hoffert, l.p. Peter Fonda, Jerry Reed, Helen Shaver, Chris Wiggins, David Ferry, Christopher Langevin, Mary Pirie, Kay Havtre, Alan Crofoot, John Friesen, Les Carlson, Cec Linder, Eric House, Myrna Lorrie, assoc. p. Stanley Chase, William Hayward, p. Jon Slan, p. manager, Marilyn Stonehouse, p.c. Jon Slan Productions Inc (1977), col. 35mm, running time 100 minutes, dist. Ambassador Films Limited.

The advertising copy for *High-Ballin'*, which was prepared by the

U.S. distributor American-International Pictures, does not inspire confidence in the merits of this picture, nor does it give any indication of its Canadian origins and location. Indeed, the poster is clearly designed to exploit the similarities between this film and Hal Needham's immensely profitable *Smokey and the Bandit*. It is certainly true that with this film producer Jon Slan and director Peter Carter firmly place themselves on the commercial or "Hollywood North" side of Canadian film, but this should not be seen as a condemnation. The test of a film like this should be whether it succeeds as entertainment and not its nationality.

The action-adventure genre is much more vulnerable than most other types of movies to either pretentiousness and verbosity on the one hand or triviality and mindlessness on the other, and recent examples of these can easily be found. Carter himself fell victim to the pretentious style in the boring *Rituals*. It did, however, teach him an important lesson, which he consistently attempts to apply in the present film; in the absence of a budget that can allow the plethora of stunts and effects of a *Jaws*, a *French Connection* or a *Smokey and the Bandit*, the best way to make an action film that works is to return to the virtues of the western, and aim for straightforwardness and simplicity. If the story is strong enough, these features should be enough — theoretically — to engage the audience.

The question is, does *High Ballin'* work on these terms? The unoriginal script, by Paul Edwards from a story by Richard Robinson and Stephen Schrenk, gives little grounds for optimism. A group of independent truckers, led by Duke Boykin (Jerry Reed), are being harrassed by a gang of high-jackers under the command of a gun-toting tough named Harvey (David Ferry), and bankrolled by the local cargo magnate, King Carroll (Chris Wiggins). Into their midst comes an old friend of Duke's, a reticent and upright ex-motorcycle stuntman with the enigmatic name of Rane (Peter Fonda), who, after some initial hesitation, agrees to help Duke and his buddies. If this sounds familiar, it should, because what Edwards, Ro-

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binson and Schrenk (with, apparently, some input from Fonda as well) have presented is a modernized version of **Shane**. Boykin even has a hero-worshipping son named Tanker (Christopher Langevin), to parallel the role played by Brandon DeWilde in George Steven's film.

Fortunately, this cliché-studded prescription for bathos is offset by the tight control Carter maintains on the story at the outset. In sharp contrast to his direction of **Rituals**, he does not let the movement of the main plot slow down. In this, he is helped by competent performances from the actors. Jerry Reed — for once out of the shadow of Burt Reynolds — gives his standard good-ol'-boy characterization in a comfortable and slyly humorous manner. He is well aided by a group of familiar faces — John Friesen, Alan Crofoot, Mary Pirie, Kay Havtrey, Cec Linder, Eric House — who represent some of the cream of Canadian character actors (whom it is nice to see employed in something other than commercials). Christopher Langevin's Tanker neatly avoids sappy sentimentality.

The villains, however, do not fare as well. Chris Wiggins is his usual solid self, but somewhat ridiculous with his vaguely Texas accent, an obvious black stetson, and a string tie which he also wears in bed. David Ferry's Harvey starts out promisingly with a sort of quiet menace, but he degenerates by the end into the type of twitchiness that even Bruce Dern is trying to abandon.

The key character in **High-Ballin'** however, is Peter Fonda's Rane, and it is with him that Carter's balancing act begins to go awry. In the straight action scenes, such as the chase where Rane hurls some old cars down on the pursuing highjackers, or the classic fight in a dimly lit barnlike barroom, Fonda handles himself with reasonable dispatch. But, in the more reflective moments, his performance begins to come apart. There are times when Rane seems a sadly eviscerated version of Wyatt from **Easy Rider**. No longer the proto-hippy, existential searcher, Fonda's character is now merely "lookin' for something," having quit his stunt riding for the most pragmatic of reasons



Rane (Peter Fonda) comes to the aid of independent trucker, Duke Boykin (Jerry Reed) laid low in a shoot-out

— though he broke "all them records," as he tells Tanker, he also broke "all them bones." At other times Fonda affects the upright innocence characteristic of his father (whom he increasingly resembles physically), or a most disconcerting John Wayne drawl.

It is in the romantic subplot, a traditional bugbear of action films, that **High-Ballin'** really falls apart. Helen Shaver begins very strongly as Pickup, a fiercely independent semi-driver with a dry sense of humour. Her wit helps to obscure the banalities of the script until, for some reason, she takes after Rane (she accurately describes him as "really slow"). The love scene that follows almost brings the film to a grinding halt, as Fonda exhibits a languidity worthy of Keith Carradine, and Shaver is not much better. Carter tries to get the momentum going again (Harvey blasts in with a machine gun), but from this point the flaws in the script become more noticeable, until the climactic shootout scene in which the western motif takes over completely as Rane and Harvey face each other with Pickup looking on like a damsel

in distress. Unlike Rane, however, Peter Carter has lost his fight with bathos.

What then is the answer to the question 'Does **High-Ballin'** work?' A qualified 'yes' is in order. The action audience will tolerate quite a bit, and it is to Carter's credit that, until the ending, he does not talk down to them or insult their intelligence. He gives them a reasonably exciting story and handles his stunts and effects with restraint.

As for its value as a Canadian production, that is a more problematical matter. **High-Ballin'** shows that Canadian technicians and actors can compete in this fundamentally American genre. Helen Shaver's career in particular will hopefully profit by the international exposure she will get here. And while it might confuse audiences in Texas or Alabama to see Canadian flags, Ontario licence plates, and maple leaves on policemen's caps, it is refreshing to see that the paranoia of our filmmakers against showing distinctive Canadian symbols is beginning to lift. Perhaps someday it might be unnecessary.

J. Paul Costabile