

Cross Country Naked, bloody and dead

Cross Country is a formula murder mystery that strings all the right clichés in proper order from the moment the waddling black maid discovers her beautiful mistress – naked, dead, and bloody – on her penthouse bed until innocent boyfriend-suspect, epicurean Philadelphia ad-man Evan Bley, and blonde siren Lois Hayes (secretly the psychotic lesbian killer) hurl themselves, bodies entwined, into the Grand Canyon. There it is in a nutshell.

And make no mistake, this a nutshell movie, a tidy package ribbon-bound in a United Artists negative pick-up. Paul Lynch, has his APC/SNC crew working Parisian days (noon to 7:30 p.m. non-stop with a running buffet), averaging 14 or 15 story-boarded set-ups. Filmline producer, Pieter Kroonenburg, is on set throughout to see that the no-name actors stand in the light and say exactly the words ordered from Bill Gray, who re-writes John Hunter's original scenes, sometimes mere hours before they're shot. Hours after each day's rushes are screened, editor Nick Rotundo works through the night assembling, timing, pacing, guarding against holes in the story and dropping a timely clue here and there. All goes well.

René Verzier's veteran camera crew set up quickly, and the ease of lighting Kodak's new 250 a.s.a. stock (5293) allows ambitious night shooting with daytime efficacy and great production value. Verzier himself, operating with the new Sachtler head under the Panaflex, has never been finer. Though the casting lacks box-office punch (Richard Beymer, Nina Axelrod, Brent Carver and Michael Ironside), all the hard-working actors suit their roles to a tee and deliver professional, well-measured performances. Beymer starred in *West Side Story* and not much else 20 years ago. He has matured into an attractive California oxygen-eating guy who seems to have lost none of the talent and creativity he displayed before dropping out of the scene. Nina Axelrod, an engaging green-eyed blonde, was a jet-set kid. In her early twenties, she already has a respectable record as a B-movie siren (*Motel Hell*, *Demon Seed*). Toronto's Mike Ironside (*Scanners*, *Visiting Hours*) departs from the maniacal in his portrayal of a tired Philly homicide detective. Carver, better known as a cabaret man (at least until we see *The Wars*), has proved a delight as a high-energy street player.

Lynch and casting director Deidre Bower have assembled a supporting cast of some of Canada's finest workaday actors, notably Michael Kane and August Schellenberg, and Paul Bradley making a comeback without his usual comic baggage.

Interesting to note, there is no TV buy-out in the contracts of the day players who shuttle into Montreal. Combine



● A scene from *Cross Country*

this with U.A.'s hold on publicity, a tight rein on exposed film and a clock-work schedule without overtime, and it seems producers Kroonenburg, David Patterson and Ron Cohen are en route to deliver a tailor-made package wholesale.

Paul Lynch, then, is left the charge of directing the film within specification. To this, he responds as a craftsman. Lynch is a cartoonist expanded up off the paper. He drew the entire film in pre-production, showing the way the bad guy flew over the table when the good guy socked him, and illustrating the shape of the dancers' tits. Now on the studio floor, he looks at his pictures and stares at his sets, then walks to the production manager's desk to let her know what lenses he'll require the next day.

All his best laid plans, of course, go awry as green after blue after pink script revisions arrive with the daily call sheets. Nevertheless, despite all the juggling of actors, sets and scenes, the film has never fallen more than a half-day behind schedule.

The small crew and minimal fleet of unmarked vehicles have worked almost invisibly at various Montreal locations throughout May and June. The cast seldom exceeds three on a given shooting day. Fewer than 300 extras have been booked for the entire seven-week shoot, many of whom barely make it to the donut line in the morning before they're dismissed without ever getting in front of camera. Lynch doesn't like a lot of background action cluttering up his sets.

Montreal has served the story ably, doubling as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Columbus, St. Louis, and even Tucumcari, New Mexico. Production manager Mychele Boudiras and unit manager Carole Mondello have secured a degree

of cooperation from city and provincial authorities that has allowed them to park vehicles and close streets, seemingly with abandon. With cameraman Verzier's preference for shooting with wide apertures and little depth of focus, the proliferation of French signs in the city has proved much less a problem than imagined.

The francophone technicians who crew English-language films in Montreal add wonderful zest to movie-set lingo with such expressions as "Stand by, les gars," and "S'addresser on the plate à cinq heures sharp!"

A reduced unit of key personnel and actors now move to Arizona to round out the filming with four days of "cascades dans le Grand Canyon."

Suzanne Lortie ●

CROSS COUNTRY p.c. Filmline Productions Inc. exec. p. Ronald Cohen, James Beach p. Pieter Kroonenburg, David Patterson d. Paul Lynch scr. John Hunter p. man. Mychele Boudiras 1st a.d. Ray Sager p. sec. Daniele Rohrbach unit man. Carole Mondello 2nd a.d. Mac Bradden script person Brigitte Germain p. design. Michel Proulx set dres. François Seguin props buyer Frances Calder props David Phillips props (apprentice) Christopher Gilmore cost. superv. Paul-André Guerin cost. superv. asst. Laura Drew hair-make-up Tom Booth d.o.p. René Verzier focus puller Denis Gingras 2nd asst. cam. Jean-Jacques Gervais stills Takashi Seida gaffer Jacques Fortier elect. Gilles Fortier key grip Serge Grenier grip (apprentice) Marion Mailhot ed. Patrick Rousseau boom Veronique Gabillaud ed. Nick Rotundo asst. ed. Jean-Marc Magnan cast. dir. Dierdre Bowen cast. (extra) Nadia Rona prod. acc. Susan Lewis prod. asst's Don Riordan, Jean-Pierre Lauréneau, Patrick Clune, Pierre Houle pub. Marc Lalonde, David Novek Associates Lp. Richard Beymer, Nina Axelrod, Brent Carver, Michael Ironside, David Conner, George Sperdakos, Michael Kane, Shea Garner, August Schellenberg, Paul Bradley Jacqueline Williams, Desmond Campbell, Anna Vitri, Pam Colver, Jérôme Thibergien, Robert Spivak, Neil Affleck, Bill Spears, Len Watt, Christiane Pasquier, Sheena Larkin

The Tin Flute/ Bonheur d'occasion Translating the reality

Claude Fournier eats his lunch alone, working out details for the film version of Gabrielle Roy's novel, *The Tin Flute*. Actually, he is directing two feature films, shot simultaneously in both French and English, and a television series consisting of five one-hour episodes to be aired on both the French and English networks of the CBC, all on a budget of \$3.45 million. Not only is Fournier the writer and director, he also does his own camera work. Something he has done in the past with his other features. He does not have time for long lunches.

Mireille Deyglun, who plays Florentine Lacasse in this tale of hard times and hope in the Dirty Thirties, rushes bleary eyed out of her bedroom.

"Personne ne m'a réveille!"

"On a essayé," her brother replies.

"Cut, print," Fournier shouts. "Même chose en anglais."

Claude Fournier is working fast. He is ahead of his 20-week shooting schedule. This is normal for him but less so for the crew from The National Film Board. The NFB is co-producing *The Tin Flute*, supplying \$1.1 million in financing, facilities and crew. Bob Verrall, the executive producer of *The Tin Flute*, acting on the behalf of the English Section of the Film Board, says, "This is a rough and tumble experience for the NFB people, used to the serene and protected environment of the Board." The NFB crew is running with Fournier. "Our people were very skeptical about the schedule," Verrall says. "But, they were impressed with Claude's skill. If he hadn't been up to it, the whole thing would have fallen apart."

Marilyn Lightstone, who plays the beleaguered mother, Rose Anna Lacasse, has also taken out membership in Fournier's fan club. "Everything comes from that guy at the top," she says. "He makes everyone feel loved and important." Lightstone, although nervous at first, feels privileged to work in the French milieu. It is the first time in her professional career that she is reunited with her francophone contemporaries from the National Theatre School. She remembers taking all classes except voice with the French students, one of whom, Michel Forget, plays her husband Azarius Lacasse. At that time, she felt the school was developing a style that was "Uniquely Canadian;" – much like this picture. The bilingual set gets a bit schizophrenic at times, but there's always room for one more. Referring to the actors playing the Lacasse family as "a whole family of schleppers," Lightstone brings a third influence to the culturally crowded set.

Even the man at the helm gets mixed up sometimes. Fournier has admitted that, during the final drafts of the script, when the pressure began to get to him, he would at times forget which language he was supposed to be working on.