

WILD HOGS __7/10

A funloving romp to lighten up with

Directed by Walt Becker
Written by Brad Copeland

Tim Allen ...	Doug Madsen
John Travolta ...	Woody Stevens
Martin Lawrence ...	Bobby Davis
William H. Macy ...	Dudley Frank
Ray Liotta ...	Jack
Marisa Tomei ...	Maggie
Jill Hennessy ...	Kelly Madsen

Wild Hogs is a no brainer.

Well, that sounds harsher than intended: What I mean is not that it takes very little gray matter to appreciate the movie (which is true), rather that the movie provides a splash of hopeful spring tonic for the schtick that lays so heavily on the minds of conscientious citizens in late winter, 2007.

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The plot involves a group of middle-class guys who ride hogs (Harley-Davidson motorcycles) together occasionally on the weekends. Each of them has his own professional challenges and problems at home:

- Doug (Tim Allen) is a successful dentist who used to be a happy-go-lucky free spirit, but settled into a routine life in suburbia with his college-sweetheart wife (Jill Hennessy) and a boy who won't play catch with him.
- Woody (John Travolta) is an attorney who's been dumped by his supermodel wife and has money problems. He becomes the instigator.
- Bobby (Martin Lawrence) under pressure of his wife, who is on the henpecking side, feels he must abandon his year-long leave of absence from his job at the firm to write a book. His real job is cleaning toilets for The Firm.
- Dudley (William Macy) is a nerdish computer programmer who's effeminate but not gay. A lot of the better lines, and arguably the better acting, come from Dudley, as for example when he inquires at the notorious, raunchy Del Fuego biker bar something to the effect of whether he can get whipped cream with his latte.

I think Dudley makes the movie.

But first things first. The four Wild Hogs meet in their customary suburban tavern, supposedly in Cincinnati but it looks like southern California to me. Woody challenges their manhood and appeals to their sense of adventure, "Let's take a wild road trip to California before we get too old to do it."

My SO bailed out of our double date for this movie based on reviews on Rotten Tomatoes. Their critics panned it at a rate of 4 to 1. (Yet 70% of viewing audiences liked it.) Judging from the negative comments—mainly that the humor was over-the-top gay and crotch jokes—I was prepared to be disappointed. But I needed a laugh, and it gave me several.

The rest of the plot is predictable. They have some funny incidents (yes, there's some gay-related humor but it's not a focus of the movie). They get in trouble with a bad biker gang, hole up in a small New Mexico town which allows the only single man, Macy's character, to hook up with a charming maiden, Maggie (Marisa Tomei (hubba hubba)).

They finally get out of trouble with the Del Fuego bikers, whose leader is played with the correct level of menace for a comedy, by Ray Liotta. And reach their destination, ultimately winding up resolving the issues they had, or at least a good share of them.

I really liked this movie. Mainly, because it's benevolent and easygoing. I cared for the characters, and laughed steadily, even a couple of belly crunchers. It's a scratch-the-itch, feel-good movie that doesn't take itself too seriously, so you don't have to take life so seriously, at least for an hour and a half. Thanks, Hollywood.

There's a surprise ending, and even a second more humorous scene in the credits. So be sure to hang around and pick up your empty popcorn bags.