

TALLADEGA NIGHTS__5/10

Modest effort at NASCAR satire/comedy

Directed by Adam McKay

Written by Will Ferrell and Adam McKay

Will Ferrell ...	Ricky Bobby
Gary Cole ...	Reese Bobby
Jane Lynch ...	Lucy Bobby
Leslie Bibb ...	Carley Bobby
Amy Adams ...	Susan
Michael Clarke Duncan ...	Lucius Washington
John C. Reilly ...	Cal Naughton, Jr.
Sacha Baron Cohen ...	Jean Girard

Continuing in review of some of the movies that amazingly did not show up at the Academy—I mean who watches movies like *The Queen*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, or *The Departed*, anyway?—I thought the story of Ricky Bobby warranted an evaluation.

Was the effort modest or feeble? Who knows? But I have to say up front Ferrell movies (e.g. *Old School* and *Anchorman*) have the same look and feel of one another. (The first few Adam Sandler movies are like that, too: basically cookie-cutter juvenile gross-out escapades that contain possibly two genuinely comic scenes among them.)

And gross they do! I'm not sure what Ferrell's box office is, compared to, say, George Clooney's movies, but I'll bet it's on the order of the viewership of professional wrestling compared to girls' basketball.

Popularity is no reason to hold anything against someone, Ferrell included. In this movie he teams up with Adam McKay of *Ron Burgundy*, *Anchorman*, fame to tell the story of a boy who has racing in his blood and lives to fulfill his father's motto: "If you're not first, you're last."

The first scene conveys the delivery of young Ricky Bobby. While his mother is in labor in the back seat, his dad, Reese (Gary Cole), pops the clutch in his Chevelle Super Sport to pop out the kid. *Qua* plot, that's more or less a high point.

Ricky grows up, becomes lifelong friends with Cal Naughton, Jr. (Reilly), busts out in NASCAR, acquires a hot bimbo wife (Bibb) and all the toys, meets his nemesis Jean Girard (a gay, French Formula-1 driver played to wretched excess by Sacha Cohen of *Ali G* and *Borat* fame), endures a period of loss, and emerges triumphant... as his newly reunited family and true-love girlfriend Susan (Adams) ride off to Applebee's for Sunday dinner.

Ferrell leaves no redneck good ol' boy stereotype unturned. In a couple of scenes Bobby makes the common man's case for basic American values as George Bush might, though more articulately. And as satire it breaks new ground in spots:

His wife has just finished slaving over a grand luncheon of Taco Bell, pizza, and Kentucky Fried. Ricky says a long grace to the "little baby Jesus," which elicits an argument from his wife that Ricky should be praying to the adult Jesus. This leads to an intellectual free-for-all around the table on the proper image of the Lord and Savior.

Well, okay, it isn't very funny, but I can imagine some innocent yokels having an argument like that. There are quite a few good moments, and my favorite funny scenes involve Gary Cole as Ricky's dad. Talk about stereotypes!

Finally, the producers, director, and camera folks do a fine job communicating 'NASCAR World' excitement. Race footage is in the vein of John Frankenheimer (*Ronin*, *Grand Prix*). And the sound track rocks. You should watch it where you can crank up the volume.

All in all, I don't think Talladega is very good, but I'll probably watch it several more times, anyway.