



LOUISE SNIDER

Even Olivier can't salvage 'The Betsy'

The strength of "The Betsy" (R) is its excellent cast. The weakness is its story.

The wealthy, powerful and oversexed people of Harold Robbins' novel are best left between book covers where readers may imagine what they please. On the screen, the characters are too ridiculous.

Of course, for Detroiters there is the added interest of recognizing a few local names and places used in the movie, but that's skimpy fare to sustain one through a lengthy picture.

Laurence Olivier, by virtue of his fascinating performance, is almost single-handedly responsible for keeping this clunker clicking.

Olivier, who might be doing Lear, instead is doing Loren Hardeman Sr., an 86-year-old auto tycoon and family patriarch. And he is doing him! Hardeman is not Cedric Hardwicke (remember him?) with the hots, but a lecherous, scheming SOB who can be treacherous one minute and sympathetic the next.

FLASHBACKS ENCOMPASS about 40 years of his life from his power pinnacle as founder and president of Bethlehem Motor Co. to his restless retirement years. Now that he's on the entrance ramp leading to that big highway in the sky, he decides he'd like some immortality.

He wants to be remembered, like Henry Ford and Hitler, for producing a "people's car," like the Model T and the Volkswagen. He calls his car "The Betsy," after his granddaughter. Hardeman has a penchant for naming cars after members of his family. He's probably hoping that the cars will set good examples for their namesakes.

The Betsy is to be a compact, fuel-efficient, nonpolluting, economical automobile. These characteristics, by the way, bear no resemblance to the human Betsy, who is front heavy, loaded with extras and expensive to maintain.

To produce this Ralph Nader dream car, he must develop it secretly and then get it approved by the board of directors over the objections of the company president, his son Loren Hardeman III (Robert Duvall).

Loren III hates Loren I because when Loren III was still in short pants, he saw his mommy (Katherine Ross) in bed with his grandfather, Loren III, the night his daddy, Loren Jr. (Paul Rudd), shot himself.

NUMBER ONE was only trying to comfort his daughter-in-law because her husband was, well, peculiar. He preferred a male friend to his wife and his car. No family's perfect, and little Loren III grew up hating Loren I.

Thus, to accomplish his goals, Hardeman Sr. had to bring in an outsider, Angelo Perino (Tommy Lee Jones, a race car driver and auto engineer).

Jones is an economical actor. One expression and a few changes of clothes suffice to carry him through the entire film. Equally subtle in interpretation is Lesley-Ann Down, who plays Lady Bobby Ayres, an interior decorator with her libido stuck in overdrive.

The performances of Jones and Down are exceptions to the otherwise capable and even excellent work of the large cast, including Robert Duvall, Jane Alexander, Edward Herrman and Paul Rudd—but I wouldn't buy a Betsy from any of them.



Tommy Lee Jones and Lesley-Ann Down are lovers in "The Betsy." He portrays a race car driver; she's a jet setter.

Glimpses

NEW RELEASES

CANDLESHOE (G). Jodie Foster in Walt Disney adventure about young heiress and a search for treasure. Helen Hayes and David Niven co-star.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (PG). Steven Spielberg's megaback epic about contact with extra-terrestrial beings. Special effects make this another treat for sci-fi fans.

COMA (PG). Scary and unpleasant movie about some strange goings-on at a hospital. Genevieve Bujold is the plucky doctor who uncovers a financial arrangement.

FOCUS (R). Intense, realistic film of prize-winning play by Richard Burton as the self-doubting psychiatrist treating a boy (Peter Firth) who has blinded six horses.

THE GOODBYE GIRL (PG). Neil Simon comedy of set-up situation and laughs when an actor (Richard Dreyfuss) moves in with a twice-dumped, actor-hating hooper (Marsha Mason).

HIGH ANXIETY (PG). Mel Brooks tips his hat to Hitchcock in this lunatic romp at the Psycho-Theatrical Institute for the Very, Very Nervous. Liberal visual "quotations" from Hitchcock in this howler.

THE LACEMAKER (R). Sensitive love story of beauty shop assistant and university student. Fine acting by Isabelle Huppert. In French with English subtitles.

THE MOUSE AND HIS CHILD (G). Award-winning full-length cartoon feature with voices of Peter Ustinov and Gloria Leachman.

THE ONE AND ONLY (PG). Zany romantic comedy with Henry Winkler pursuing Kim Darby and getting gussied up as a wrestler called "The Lover."

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G General audiences admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X No one under 18 admitted.

Jack Rabbit, Carnaval create 'Joie de Vivre' in Quebec

Story and photo: ED BAS

Jack Rabbit is the nickname of a familiar Quebec aspect of "Joie de Vivre." The "Joy of Life" in Quebec is an amalgamation of mountain slopes and cafes, cathedrals and Carnaval.

Jack Rabbit is a legendary 182-year-old who lives between Montreal and Quebec and still skis cross-country. His name is on a brand of ski wax. The story of Jack Rabbit was told to me by Mark Hardey, who just might one day be a candidate to take over the legend.

Hardey works with the Canadian Government Department of Tourism and is 57 years old. He has been skiing in earnest for only the last seven years after a long abstinence, but has returned to the sport with a vengeance. He competes in 46-mile races. As a boy, he was a ski cross-country to the mountain slopes, change the bindings and use the same skis to ski downhill for a few hours before switching again and skiing home.

Mont Ste. Anne is 25 miles east of Quebec, 2,650 feet of icy runs including several that are more than three miles long. It is the site for many ski contests, yet some of the runs are gentle enough for the amateur. A gondola lift to the summit seems endless, with a heart-stopping view of rural Quebec and the frozen St. Lawrence Seaway.

THE MOUNTAIN is being developed for active recreation and includes nearly 70 miles of cross-country trails, summer camping, a new ski jump and hiking trails.

Part of the Joie de Vivre is not merely coping with snow and cold, as most do in Michigan, waiting for spring, but reveling in the winter. The snow seems to bother no one in Quebec, except perhaps the tourists from Florida with sunburn instead of windburn.

Le Carnaval is an annual event in the city where the love of snow and refusal to hibernate dominate.

As a guest of the Canadian Department of Tourism, I accompanied a media group to study first hand effects of the mid-winter madness known as Le Carnaval.

Quebec is a mix of the old and the new. Le Carnaval is only a quarter century old, yet already tradition-bound. Carnaval Square surrounds an ice castle built every year from ice and metal struts. Ice sculptures try their hand at dragons and sleighs with entries from Iran, Japan and this year's winner, Canada's Inuit Indians.

Dancing is a Carnaval mainstay, at midnight and beyond, in weather that hovered accommodatingly between 10 and 20 degrees Fahrenheit. The music was English Canadian and United States disco, but many of the dancers, and much of the population of Quebec, is French-speaking.



Colorful float goes by during Carnaval, which attracts upwards of a half-million visitors to Quebec each winter.

Travel

THERE IS A drink produced in Quebec particularly popular around Carnaval time. It is an alcohol-fortified red wine known as Caribou. It is named for the traditional but non-alcoholic Caribou blood drunk by trappers, hunters and travelers. Carnaval revelers carry the drink in hollow plastic canes and horns. To see somebody lug a cold six-pack means that there are tourists in the crowd.

A parade of floats, marchers and masqueraders is held on the main thoroughfare, many of the floats carved from ice and aglow with electric lights. Some of the marchers wear only shirts and jackets, without coats, or hat, and flowing sash wrapped around the waist. Hats and sashes, but not necessarily gloves, earmuffs or even coats.

In the daytime, there are more fun on two legs than you will see in any city in the States. Full-length coats are worn by as many men as women, and ski suits abound. On the frozen river during the daytime, there are races: a four-wheel drive race, a snowshoe race, and the Carnaval tradition of canoe races with soaked participants fighting their way around and over the ice flows.

THE HOTEL de la Concorde, where we stayed, is as modern a hotel as you'd find in Washington D.C. or Detroit. It has the revolving restaurant at the 59th floor that is almost a hotel mainstay these days. If you dial room service they will answer in English. The breakfast fare is familiar: the rooftop serving primarily steak and lobster. There is even a discotheque in the basement and the closest you get to true Quebecois is a view of the old city for a portion of that 360 degree spin while eating.

But Quebec, even at Carnaval, is not all modern revelry. Jacques Cartier wrote in 1535, "from the middle of November until the 15th day of April, we have been continually closed in by ice, which is of a thickness of more than 10 feet... and on the inside walls, there is a layer of ice which is four fingers thick."

Naval architect Francois Cordeau reconstructed Cartier's ship, La Grande Hermine, with research done by the Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal. Seeing the ship and its stark confines, lends a taste of true Quebecois. Anyone taller than 5-5 has trouble moving in the passageways.

The crew slept on piles of straw next to the livestock. Captain's quarters were a private, dark little closet. And his discos and brevity can easily be avoided by a stroll to a brunch cafe, a gaze at the frozen St. Lawrence, a trip to the wine cellar for a glass of Caribou.

Staunchly proud, rich in heritage, Quebec can be a retreat for the winter blues as much as a jaunt to Florida. Its people are undaunted by winter. And its discos and brevity can easily be avoided by a stroll to a brunch cafe, a gaze at the frozen St. Lawrence, a trip to the wine cellar for a glass of Caribou.

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