



Michael Andropoulos (Michael Douglas) is in the lead for a good part of the Olympic Marathon, in Universal's "Running."



'Running' drags, despite its theme of Olympic race

There are a few misconceptions about "Running" (PG) that should be cleared up. Some people might expect the pace of this film to be too quick for easy viewing. It's not. There are no quick sprints, only a slow, continuing shuffle.

In fact, in the opening scenes, we note that Michael Douglas — in suit, shirt, tie and track shoes — manages to run for miles and arrive at his destination just a bit out of breath and without one

little drop of sweat on him. So much for pace.

Another aspect of this film that seems to promote confusion among audiences is its passing similarity to "Rocky." In "Running," Douglas plays an over-the-hill, 34-year-old marathon runner in training for the Olympic trials. He's not only over the hill, but down the alley and in the gutter. Nevertheless, he gets his "shot at the championship."

Thus we see him huff and puff through the rigors of training. He also must contend with his irascible ex-coach who keeps telling him what a loser he is. There are other similarities to "Rocky." Such as the inspirational, upbeat music; the kids running along with the hero; the visit to the empty stadium before the race. But put these similarities aside, and the film is no "Rocky."

SOME PEOPLE, those peculiar souls who don't fancy athletic competition, may refrain from viewing "Running," because they expect it to be a serious film about the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat. This assumption is unwarranted.

"Running" more closely resembles comedy than drama. Douglas is outstanding for the droll manner he effects. This is demonstrated to best advantage in an episode at the auto dealership where he works as a car washer.

The owner, sensing Douglas' publicity value as a potential Olympic star, offers him big money to meet the public up front as a salesman. Douglas looks his benefactor straight in the eyes and deadpans, "I just want to wash cars."

The film boasts dozens of equally hilarious moments. Some of them might be overlooked by the casual observer were it not for Susan Anspach (as Douglas ex-wife), who always signals them with a precocious giggle. In a perpetually happy state, she simply laughs her way through the film.

Apparently, it is her way of "surviving," just as she says about Douglas, in another memorable piece of dialogue, "Running is his only way of surviving."

IN ANOTHER fast exchange, some young runners comment to the tough-talking coach that he seems to know a lot about Douglas. There is a dramatic pause while the coach slowly turns to them and says, "I was his coach."

Dialogue such as this reflects the most unusual characteristic of "Running." It's an audience participation film. You won't need a warm-up suit to follow. All you have to do is anticipate and shout out the next line of dialogue before it's spoken. The skill can be mastered after the first 10 minutes of "Running."



Although they're about to be divorced, Michael and Janet (Susan Anspach) still love each other.

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