Bevery D'Angelo simpers and sighs, while Chevy Chase varies with only two facial expressions in the meant-to-be-comic "National Lampoon's Vacation."

the movies
Louise Snider

'Vacation' travels humorless road

Louise Snider is on vacation. Guest critic is Dan Greenberg, film instructor at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills.

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

The history of the motion picture is so broad and diverse that one hesitates to nominate any one film as "the worst."

"National Lampoon's Vacation" struggles for that distinction. But in that regard, as in all others, it fails. Its only real success is in boring and offending audiences.

As the film opens, the Family Griswold (a predictable father, mother, son and daughter comfortably installed in a new station wagon) begins a determined Chicago-LA trek to visit the Walley World Amusement Park.

Neither retarded relatives, dead aunts, malicious auto mechanics nor a closed amusement park interfere with their *fun-fun-fun*.

Audiences for this film are not going to be so fortunate.

Poor acting, weak directing, offensive material and a marginal, episodic structure severely limit viewing pleasure.

The film has all the appeal of an evening spent viewing the Lockhorn's home movies.

A FILM with Christine Brinkley can't be all bad.

Wanna bet?

Besides the Grand Canyon photographed to look like an inexpensive, poorly painted backdrop, Brinkley is the only visual attraction in "Vacation."

She appears and reappears in a red Corvette as Mr. Griswold's fantasy. When the fantasy materializes and approaches him in the motel bar, the cinematography miraculously manages to flatten her features in an unflattering way. However, in the moment which follows, Brinkley emerges from the pool, lovely and dripping as seductively as any Venus. But one image cannot redeem a 100-minute film.

"Vacation's" deficiencies are major. The writers failed to understand the difference between satire and ridicule; the director and his actors believe that "pace" means slow.

"Vacation's" satiric possibilities are quickly lost. Instead of exaggerating human foibles slightly to make us laugh and understand a bit about what it means to be human, as satire usually does, "Vacation" exaggerates excessively and ridicules everyone and everything. Nothing has a redeeming human quality.

Everyone is either foolish, mean, contemptuous, bitter, hateful, or all of the above. That's no fun, and that's not funny. Life's not like that and certainly comedy isn't funny when everyone's a fool.

COMIC IMPACT depends on fast-paced introduction of the unexpected. "Vacation" is so slow that every gag, every pratfall, every event, every line takes so long that the audience figures it out and forgets it before it happens. Even the ever-popular crash-your-car-through-a-barricade gag wasn't funny because it took so long to reach the barrier after Foolish Father passed the "Road Closed" sign.

Chevy Chase as Father Griswold utilized only two facial expressions: "Boy, am I great!" and "Oops! I just stepped in the dog poo." Beverly D'Angelo, as Mother Griswold, has obviously trained at the Simper and Sigh School of Acting.

Imogene Coca's excellent comedic talents are not utilized in her role as flaky Aunt Edna. First the director stuffs her in the back seat of the station wagon and then on the luggage rack after she dies. The two Griswold children Audrey (Dana Barron) and Rusty (Anthony Michael Hall) exhibit some acting talent, particularly when Rusty has to cope with Father Griswold's paternal pomposity.

Readers may consider these disgruntled comments merely complaints of an old man for whom such films are not designed. But the large number of young people in the audience for whom such films are so loosely crafted weren't laughing either.

Christie Brinkley is a fantasy for Father Griswold, but her beauty alone isn't enough to make film attractive.

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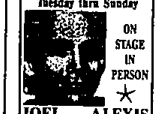
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