

Nobody wants to see the message in 'Roger & Me'

I've seen Roger Smith twice recently, but I still haven't been able to pin down Michael Moore, the filmmaker whose "Roger & Me" purports to document Moore's quest for answers from Smith about Flint's auto unemployment.

I did, however, finally get to see the movie, which is playing in local theaters for a \$745 discount compared to what it would have cost me to attend the Denver Film Festival.

THE FILM uses the auto industry as a comic metaphor for the growing disparity in today's post-industrial society between the haves and have-nots. Moore's satirical essay on his Flint-area upbringing and the economic troubles that hit that town with the force of the Great Depression in the last two decades is superimposed on a series of images of urban poverty and a complacent middle class.

Moore remembers a bucolic Flint of his childhood in the 1950s and con-

trasts it with Flint of today, ravaged by crime and poverty and still suffering from one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation.

MAKING A comedy out of social tragedy is not for the thin-skinned. Moore's comic genius works like a feature-length version of Candid Camera run amok, as he impersonates a television reporter to get interviews from his unsuspecting subjects.

Some of this is hilarious, including a scene in a San Francisco coffee shop where the waitress takes two minutes to list the varieties of caffeine without once mentioning a cup of coffee.

Or a former radio host turned cosmetic saleswoman, infinitely concerned about whether her customers' color scheme is "winter" or "summer."

SHOW BIZ nitwits, baton twirlers



auto talk
Dan McCosh

and Flint's convention recruiting all get jobs, as does a hapless woman who raises stew rabbits for some income.

Then the belly laughs are caught short as Moore poses for a gag while a mentally ill man in the street dressed in a Superman cape is gunned down, live, with real bullets.

The scene is enough to cut away the comic veneer and bring home the reality that these are real people, somehow stripped of their real voices and used as images on a screen, reacting to a stranger pointing a camera, as politely as they know how.

ABOVE IT all floats the image of GM chairman Roger Smith, whose name and face provide a hook for the movie as a symbol for uncaring corporate America. Sometimes obviously confused by Moore's antics, Smith's voiceless image is set up to take the bitter odds with his record as reinvesting more in blighted urban centers than any other GM chairman in history.

But the movie is not about fairness, or even journalism, despite Moore's pious protests when the manipulative editing is criticized. Perhaps it takes a comedy to bring a taste of America's human tragedy to the screen.

I WOULD also like to think that if nothing else, a movie like "Roger & Me" might bring some awareness of the human cost of industrial dislocation. But so far, there has been far more concern about the death of a stew rabbit in the movie than the aforementioned human being shot down on camera.

Likewise, the movie depends on the notion of a leering, uncaring Roger Smith to personify an otherwise faceless economic system. Smith himself never has a chance, as his face and name are used mercilessly to further the image needed to make the film work.

In the end it is a powerful film, and if you look closely you can see yourself somewhere in it. But be careful; you might not be one of the good guys.

THEN AGAIN, what's this got to do with the auto business, anyway? Well, "Roger & Me" is only the

third movie in general release about autoworkers that comes to mind — others being Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times" — a far more sympathetic comic portrayal of life on the assembly line — and the recent "Gung Ho" by Ron Howard, another comedy that portrayed a paternal Japanese management painfully educating the likes of Michael Moore's Flint autoworker.

Like its predecessors, the film ultimately will do something to shape what Americans think about GM, the industry and even American cars. Unfortunately, after the laughs die off what is left is a lingering image of an industry run by ogres and employing hapless buffoons who automatically turn to crime when the paycheck is gone.

Which may not be so funny, after all.

Dan McCosh is the automotive editor of Popular Science.

datebook

- **Word Perfect**
Thursday, Jan. 18 — A four-session course, Word Perfect for Beginners, will be offered at Oakland University near Rochester from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Thursdays, Jan. 18 to Feb. 8. Tuition \$125. For a brochure or to register, call 370-3120 between 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.
- **Women in Computing**
Thursday, Jan. 18 — Association for Women in Computing meets in Southfield. Information: Jolene Larkin, 758-8724.
- **Accountants association**
Thursday, Jan. 18 — National Association of Accountants meets in Bloomfield Hills. Information: 927-1172.
- **Women business owners**
Thursday, Jan. 18 — National Association of Women Business Owners meets in Detroit. Information: Martha Kummer, 851-8270.
- **Marketing basics**
Friday, Jan. 19 — "Marketing Basics for Non-Marketing Professionals" offered 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Southfield. Fee: \$75. Information: Lisa Pajot, 769-6200. Sponsor: Deloitte & Touche.
- **Beginning IBM**
Saturday, Jan. 20 through Feb. 10 — "For Beginners: The IBM PC" offered 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. near Rochester. Fee: \$115. Information: Oakland University Division of Continuing Education, 370-3120.
- **Financial planning**
Monday, Jan. 22 — Registration begins for evening non-credit courses in personal financial planning certificate program offered by Oakland University. Information: 370-3120.
- **LSAT preparation**
Tuesdays and Thursdays, Jan. 23 through Feb. 8 — Preparation class-

- es for law school admissions test offered 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. near Rochester. Fee: \$175. Information: Oakland University Division of Continuing Education, 370-3120.
- **Individual investors**
Tuesday, Jan. 23 — American Association of Individual Investors meets at 6:30 p.m. at the Marriott Hotel in Southfield. Non-member fee: \$15. Information: Lorraine Beechok, 455-7025.
- **Start a business**
Wednesday, Jan. 24 — "How to Start or Run a Small Business" offered free at 7 p.m. at the Somerset Inn in Troy. No advance reservations. Sponsor: Wayne State University.
- **Investment seminar**
Wednesday, Jan. 31 — "Tax Free, Tax Advantaged and High Yield Instruments" begins at 7 p.m. in Rochester. Free. Information: Bob Sheppard, 358-8003 or 1 (800) 482-0168. Sponsor: Shearson Lehman Hutton.

Small business can benefit from skillful confrontation

Confrontation is one way of bringing problems into the open. Webster defines confrontation as the process of "bringing face to face" and "to cause to meet." Within the small business environment, proper confrontation can resolve differences, correct poor working habits, and eliminate negative feelings that may have built up over days, months or even years.

Little has been written to help small business owners, managers and employees develop good confrontation skills. Many resist confronting altogether for fear of being disliked, creating anger or becoming too emotional. But the most common block to initiating successful confrontation is a lack of proper skills.

The good news is that these skills can be developed to produce creative thought and action to resolve problems — while reminding others of their potential and ability to excel.

The most basic confrontation skill is your attitude. What visual images come to mind when you think of confrontation? Do you think of calmly bringing an issue "face to face" to



focus: small business
Mary DiPaolo

achieve a satisfactory solution? Or are you automatically upset and tense, imagining yourself in conflict with the other person?

Remember that all confrontation must occur with total respect to the long-term growth of the individual. It is important to build up and not put down. This means approaching positively (from a helpful point of view), not negatively (as a destructive influence).

Because problems with other people often evoke an emotional response, successful confrontation involves gaining and maintaining control of your own thoughts and feelings. It also means identifying what you want the confrontation to accomplish. Your goal (the desirable outcome) must be clear before any confrontation is initiated. Do you

want the other person to change? Are you willing to change? Is compromise the best solution? If you don't set specific confrontation goals, you will be doing nothing more than unproductive complaining.

To assure that you maintain control of the direction of any confrontation, it is important to plan your message in writing. Writing it out will help you organize your thoughts, focus more clearly, and understand the entire scope of the problem.

During this process, you will either change your perspective on the situation or be more sure of your original confrontation goals. If you don't write out what you plan on saying beforehand, you run the risk of "neutralizing" your actual delivery.

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