

Movie Review: Speed Racer

Written by {ga=mitch}

Saturday, May 10 2008 7:00 PM -

The first big budget film of the 2008 blockbuster season has arrived. The Wachowski Brothers', they of The Matrix trilogy and also the excellent "V For Vendetta", take on "Speed Racer", the mega popular Japanese anime cartoon from the 60's. There was a lot of fan fair surrounding this film, and Mitch has a very strong opinion on it after trekking out to the theaters to see it for us this weekend. Did he love it or hate it? Find out in his latest movie review for us ...



The first big budget Bomb of 2008 has arrived.

I should have seen this coming. The Wachowski Brothers' pitiful follow-ups to their brilliant sci-fi fantasy "The Matrix" were reviled even more than George Lucas for Star Wars Episode I (Jar Jar Binks) and Episode 2 ("starring" Hayden Christensen, perhaps the world's worst actor). The brothers seemed out of ideas for what to do with Neo and company, and therefore, like Lucas, chose to try to dazzle everyone with stunning visuals, hoping that they would ignore the complete lack of a story.

I had hoped things were going back in the right direction three years ago when they made "V for Vendetta", which I thought was an extraordinary film. But, as it turns out, that quality seems to have been more from the efforts of

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director James McTeigue and the original graphic novel from Alan Moore. All the Wachowski Brothers did for that film was to adapt Moore's work for the screen, and credit should at least be given to the fact that they didn't screw it up.

So now comes the brothers' loving homage to the first Japanese anime they ever saw, the corny "Speed Racer", and what they have created is a cotton candy colored mess of a nauseating mixture of live action and animation. This is a film not only devoid of a brain, but also missing a soul, a heart, and probably both inner ears as well, as it might be the first movie to induce vertigo (although judging by the previews, "Journey to the Center of the Earth in 3-D" will top it).

The worst decision was the one they made to not adapt or update the cartoon at all, but to try to cut-n-paste a 1960s cartoon onto a 2008 digital movie screen. So if you've watched even one cartoon, you know exactly what is coming. You have erstwhile young Speed (Emile Hirsh), his plucky girlfriend Trixie (Christina Ricci), Mom and Pops Racer (Susan Sarandon and John Goodman), crew chief Sparky (Kick Gurry), and obnoxious pudgy little brother Spritle and his creepy pet chimpanzee Chim Chim. At the peripherals of this happy family is the mysterious masked driver "Racer X", played by Matthew Fox. And even if you haven't watched a single cartoon, if you can't figure out who he is within the first 10 minutes, you probably also had trouble with the history question "when did the War of 1812 start?".

Sarandon should at least get some credit for her performance, mostly for being able to keep a straight face through all of the drivel. For the rest of them, they look pretty bored. Especially Fox, who seems to be more interested in getting back to the Island in "Lost" than he is in sitting around in a chair making grimacing expressions in front of a green screen for the CGI gurus to do their magic.

It's a good thing that we already know that Emile Hirsch is a good actor, based on his performance in last year's "Into the Wild", because if we were just

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judging on this film, I might be tempted to put him in Hayden Christensen territory. But since I do know better, the blame fall solely upon the Wachowskis.

As far as John Goodman goes, once again, all the warning signs were there. The last time Goodman played a character from an adaptation of a cartoon was "The Flintstones", possibly one of the worst films of all time (although it was out-sucked by "The Flintstones Do Rock Vegas"). The Rules have been set: Put Goodman as the Voice in an animated film = good ("Monsters, Inc", "Bee Movie"). Put Goodman in an adaptation of an animated series = bad.

I will admit that as a kid, the most annoying part of the series were the antics of that little fat brat Spritle and that stupid chimp. Unfortunately, the Wachowskis decided to keep that plot line in its entirety. It was beyond annoying...and crossed over the point where it might have been the dumbest scenes I've seen on film since "Smokin' Aces".

Visually, the film was fantastic to watch for five minutes at a time. There is absolutely no attempt at anything closely regarding realism, from the Hot Wheels on Steroids "race tracks" that the drivers run on, or in the laws of physics and gravity that are blithely ignored. I don't really have a problem with that, it was just that everything was so completely disjointed. It rushed from one scene to another at breakneck speed, without any clear cohesion between what you just saw, and what happens next. This isn't a case of Style Over Substance, it's a case of All Style and No Substance.

The bottom line is this is a movie that is only fit for boys between the ages of 7 and 11...except for the fact that at slightly over two hours, even that audience may become bored with it all. For anyone older than that...go out and rent "Talladega Nights".

My rating: Mike Phipps (1/2 football). The excellent visuals were the only thing

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stopping this from getting Spergeoned.