

From bumper to bumper, ‘F1’ is Formula One spectacle

BY JAKE COYLE
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The wide-screen spectacle of Formula One gets a gleaming, rip-roaring workout in Joseph Kosinski’s “F1,” a fine-tuned machine of a movie that, in its most riveting racing scenes, approaches a kind of high-speed splendor.

Kosinski, who last endeavored to put moviegoers in the seat of a fighter jet in “Top Gun: Maverick,” has moved to the open cockpits of Formula One with much the same affection, if not outright need, for speed. A lot of the same team is back. Jerry Bruckheimer produces. Ehren Kruger, a co-writer on “Maverick,” takes sole credit here. Hans Zimmer, a co-composer previously, supplies the thumping score.

And, again, our central figure is an older, high-flying cowboy plucked down in an ultramodern, gas-guzzling conveyance to teach a younger generation about old-school ingenuity and, maybe, the enduring appeal of denim.

But whereas Tom Cruise is a particularly forward-moving action star, Brad Pitt, who stars as the driving-addicted Sonny Hayes in “F1,” has always been a more arrestingly poised presence. Think of the way he so calmly and half-interestedly faces off with Bruce Lee in Quentin Tarantino’s “Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood.” In the opening scene of “F1,” he’s sleeping in a van with headphones on when someone rouses him. He splashes some water on his face and walks a few steps over to the Daytona oval, where he quickly enters his team’s car, in the midst of a 24-hour race. Pitt goes from zero to 180 mph in a minute.

Sonny, a long-ago phenom who crashed out of Formula One decades earlier and has since

F1

3 out of 4 stars

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Running Time: 155 mins

been racing any vehicle, even a taxi, he can get behind the wheel of, is approached by an old friend, Ruben Cervantes (Javier Bardem) about joining his flagging F1 team, APX. Sonny turns him down at first but, of course, he joins and “F1” is off to the races.

The title sequence, exquisitely timed to the syncopated rhythms of Zimmer’s score, is a blistering introduction. The hotshot rookie driver Noah Pearce (Damson Idris) is just running a practice lap, but Kosinski, his camera adeptly moving in and out of the cockpit, uses the moment to plunge us into the high-tech world of Formula One, where every inch of the car is connected to digital sensors monitored by a watchful team. Here, that includes technical director Kate McKenna (Kerry Condon) and Kaspar Molinski (Kim Bodnia), the team’s chief.

Verisimilitude is of obvious importance to the filmmakers, who bathe this very Formula One-authorized film in all the sleek operations and globe-trotting spectacle of the sport. That Apple, which produced the film, would even go for such a high-priced summer movie about Formula One is a testament to the upswing in popularity of a sport once quite niche in America, and of the halo effects of both the Netflix series “Formula 1: Drive to Survive” and the much-celebrated driver Lewis Hamilton, an executive producer on “F1.”

Whether “F1” pleases diehards I’ll leave to more ardent followers of the circuit. But



This image released by Apple TV+ shows Damson Idris as Joshua Pearce, left, and Brad Pitt as Sonny Hayes in a scene from “F1 The Movie.”

what I can say definitively is that Claudio Miranda knows how to shoot it. The cinematographer, who has shot all of Kosinski’s films as well as wonders like Ang Lee’s “Life of Pi,” brings Formula One to vivid, visceral life. When “F1” heads to the big races, Miranda is always simultaneously capturing the zooming cars from the asphalt while backgrounding it with the sweeping spectacle of a course like the U.K.’s fabled Silverstone Circuit.

OK, you might be thinking, so the racing is good; is there a story? There’s what I’d call enough of one, though you might have to go to the photo finish to verify that. When Sonny shows up, and rapidly turns one practice vehicle into toast, it’s clear that he’s going to be an agent of chaos at APX, a low-ranking team that’s in heavy debt and struggling to find a car that performs.

This gives Pitt a fine opportunity to flash his charisma, playing Sonny as an obsessive who refuses any trophy and has no real interest

in money, either. The flashier, media-ready Noah watches Sonny’s arrival with skepticism, and two begin more as rivals than teammates. Idris is up to the mano-a-mano challenge, but he’s limited by a role ultimately revolving around — and reducing to — a young Black man learning a lesson in work ethic.

A relationship does develop, but “F1” struggles to get its characters out of the starting blocks, keeping them closer to the cliches they start out as. The actor who, more than anyone, keeps the momentum going is Condon, playing an aerodynamics specialist whose connection with Pitt’s Sonny is immediate. Just as she did in between another pair of headstrong men in “The Banshees of Inisherin,” Condon is a rush of naturalism.

If there’s something preventing “F1” from hitting full speed, it’s its insistence on having its characters constantly voice Sonny’s motivations. The same holds true on the race course, where broadcast

commentary narrates virtually every moment of the drama. That may be a necessity for a sport where the crucial strategies of hot tires and pit-stop timing aren’t quite household concepts. But the best car race movies — from “Grand Prix” to “Senna” to “Ferrari” — know when to rely on nothing but the roar of an engine.

“F1” steers predictably to the finish line, cribbing here and there from sports dramas before it. (Tobias Menzies plays a board member with uncertain corporate goals.) When “F1” does, finally, quiet down, for one blissful moment, the movie, almost literally, soars. It’s not quite enough to forget all the high-octane macho dramatics before it, but it’s enough to glimpse another road “F1” might have taken.

“F1,” an Apple Studios productions released by Warner Bros., is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for strong language and action. Running time: 155 minutes. Three stars out of four.

SMOKE

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worked together on the 2022 Apple TV+ series “Black Bird.” It also stars Jurnee Smollett, Anna Chlumsky and John Leguizamo, and boasts an original, eerie song by Radiohead’s Thom Yorke called “Dialing In.”

Egerton plays Dave Guden, an arson investigator in Umlerland, a fictional town in the Pacific Northwest, who is chasing two separate firebugs. He’s teamed up with a smart but troubled detective played by Smollett, who begin a game of cat and mouse.

If the setup sounds like it leads to a typical TV procedural, viewers who stick around get rewarded by a show that gets weirder and more complex, infused by Lehane’s attraction to moral ambiguity.

“We walk with contradictions and I think that’s the dramatic irony that Dennis is exploring,” says Smollett. “These people are saying they’re fighting to do the right thing and yet they’re morally questionable. I think that’s very relevant today.”

GOOFY AND FRIGHTENING

Egerton’s Dave, it’s soon clear, is not who he appears to be and has an almost superhuman ability to compartmentalize aspects of his personal and private lives. He is both bombastic and insecure, goofy and frightening.

“Taron has endless reservoirs of talent to draw on. He’s an extremely inspired actor,” says Lehane. “He comes at it from the same place I come at it, which is Taron won’t take a role unless some part of it scares him. I won’t tell a story unless some of it scares me.”

Egerton said he relished a chance to show a different side of himself,

rebellng a little at his safe, good-guy public persona after the success of his heroic turn in 2024’s “Carry-On.”

“You know what? I’m not that affable. I am sometimes, but I’m not some of the time,” he says, laughing. “I think the thing I love about Dave is there is a tension between what the perception of him is and who he really is. And how can you ever really know who a person is?”

Adding to the series’ allure is some of Lehane’s street poetry, like the line: “Whatever you do, whatever you know, however much lifetime wisdom you’ve accrued, fire puts a lie to it all.”

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Smollett was onboard after an initial conversation with Lehane in which he said: “So many of us say we want to be happy and yet we are drawn to the very thing that will destroy us.” That was Smollett’s entry point to her gloriously messy character.

Smollett’s detective, a former Marine, refuses to be vulnerable, is excellent at her job, traumatized by a past experience with arson and not afraid to mess with anyone. Early on, she is shown using a sledgehammer to her own home.

“She plays with fire,” says Smollett. “She’s living on the edge and has this mask and this guard up and walks around as if she’s invincible because she’s really just afraid.”

Lehane says with “Smoke” he’s drawn to people who invest in a narrative of who they choose to be rather than be true to who they really are.

“You don’t know who they are because they don’t know who they are,” he says. “They’re running from themselves, they’re running from their true selves. And I felt like that’s the interesting story here I’m trying to tell.”

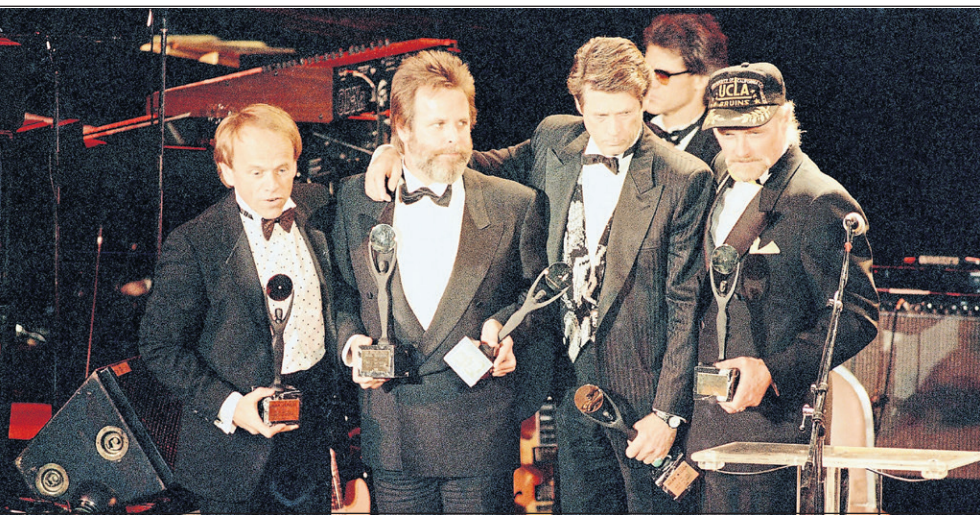
MUSIC

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27 in 1970. He was composing a song suite about an animated Black superhero, says Tom Maxwell, whose podcast “Shelved” unearths stories behind lost music. Hendrix sent a tape of his work to longtime drummer Mitch Mitchell for advice on fleshing it out. That music was set aside at Mitchell’s home and forgotten for two decades after Hendrix died. To date, Hendrix’s estate has made only one of these recordings public, a song called “Suddenly November Morning.” Hendrix, after clearing his throat, slips in and out of falsetto while accompanying himself on an acoustic guitar.

“A STORY,” YOKO ONO

Written while Yoko Ono was separated from John Lennon during his infamous “lost weekend” in 1973-74, “A Story” had the potential of changing the musical narrative around her. It was a strong album — without the avant-garde stylings that made Ono a challenge for mainstream listeners — recorded with musicians who worked on Lennon’s “Walls & Bridges.” Maxwell calls it “an emancipation manifesto” that was set aside when Ono reconciled with Lennon. She’s never publicly explained why, Maxwell says, although one song seems clearly about an affair she had while Lennon was away. Some of the material from “A Story” was included as part of the “Onobox” project that came out in 1992, and the album was released separately in 1997. Ono also re-recorded some of its songs in 1980, and Lennon was holding a tape of her composition “It Happened” when he was shot and killed. In it, she sings about an unspecified, seemingly traumatic event: “It happened at a time of my life when I least expected.” That wasn’t even the most chilling premonition. Her song “O’Oh” ended with firecrackers that sound like gunshots. It was left off the 1997 release.



The Beach Boys, from left, Al Jardine, Carl Wilson, Brian Wilson and Mike Love, hold their trophies after being inducted into the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame in New York on Jan. 21, 1988.

“CHINESE DEMOCRACY,” GUNS N’ ROSES

Guns N’ Roses was at the top of the hard rock world when they began recording a new album in 1994. It didn’t go well. Inconclusive sessions slogged on for years, and all but singer Axl Rose left the group. Recording costs exceeded a staggering \$13 million, by some accounts the most expensive rock album ever. One witness told The New York Times in 2005: “What Axl wanted to do was to make the best record that had ever been made. It’s an impossible task. You could go on indefinitely, which is what they’ve done.” When “Chinese Democracy” was finally released in 2008, the world yawned.

“LOVE MAN,” MARVIN GAYE

Not even a decade after the triumph of “What’s Going On,” Marvin Gaye was floundering. His “Here, My Dear” divorce album flopped, he struggled with drugs and searched for relevance in the disco era. The single “Ego Tripping Out,” meant to herald a new album, laid bare the problems: Over a melody cribbed from Donna Summer’s “Hot Stuff,” the famously cool “Love Man” boasted like an insecure rapper. He scrapped the album, repurposing some its material for the 1981 disc “In Our Lifetime,” a process so



Members of Green Day, from left, Billie Joe Armstrong,, Tre Cool and Mike Dirnt pose in their hotel room in Toronto on Sept. 23, 2004.

fraught he bitterly left his longtime label Motown. Gaye went to CBS, made a huge comeback with “Sexual Healing,” then was shot dead by his father in 1984.

“HOMEGROWN,” NEIL YOUNG

Neil Young rivals Prince in the volume of material left in his vault, and he’s been systematically releasing much of it. The mostly acoustic “Homegrown” was recorded as 1974 bled into 1975, during Young’s breakup with actor Carrie Snodgress. Instead of releasing it in 1975, he put out another heartbreak album, the well-regarded “Tonight’s the Night,” about losing friends to drug abuse. When Young finally dropped “Homegrown” in 2020, he wrote in his blog, “Sometimes

life hurts. This is the one that got away.”

“STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA SESSIONS,” BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Of the discs included in Springsteen’s “Tracks II” set, this was reportedly the closest to being released, in the spring of 1995. After the success of the Oscar-winning song “Streets of Philadelphia,” Springsteen recorded an album in the same vein, with a synthesizer and West Coast rap-inspired drum loops setting the musical motif. Strikingly contemporary for its time, Springsteen ultimately felt it was too similar to previous releases dominated by dark stories about relationships. “I always put them away,” he said of his lost albums. “But I don’t throw them away.”