

'Joy Ride' twists the R-rated comedy formula

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<<<

out of <<<<<<

Running Time:
95 minutes

This feature film from Lionsgate opens at cinemas on Friday, July 7.

Wild and raunchy R-rated comedies featuring characters getting themselves into awkward and uncomfortable situations are nothing new in the movie world. In recent years, audiences have seen *The Hangover* trilogy, the *Bad Moms* films and even *No Hard Feelings*, which was released only two weeks ago.

Joy Ride

is another comedy that fits into the mold, but offers a bit of a twist on the formula. It isn't subtle, but the movie does feature some memorably crazy moments to help it stand above the crowd.

Audrey Sullivan (Ashley Park) is an Asian-American business executive striving to make an impression on her bosses. After being asked to close an important deal in China, she heads off

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without a working knowledge of Mandarin. In order to overcome potential language barriers, Audrey asks for assistance from college pal Kat (Stephanie Hsu) who is now working as an actress in China, and also takes along childhood friend/struggling artist Lolo (Sherry Cola). Also joining the group is Lolo’s oddball cousin Deadeye (Sabrina Wu).

While things immediately go wrong between herself and company president Chao (Ronny Cheng), Audrey feels forced into accepting an invitation to attend a party along with her birth mother. She fails to inform Chao that she is an adoptee who has no idea where her birth mother is. In desperation, Audrey and her friends rush to locate her mom.

The movie does come across as a little blunt early on as uptight Audrey and her brazen friend Lolo are introduced. That isn’t to say that their interactions with each other and others aren’t amusing, but some bits do come across as very exaggerated (in particular, the protagonist’s conversations with employers and co-workers). Additionally, all of the four main characters do possess general traits early on. One is stiff and jittery, another is curt and gruff, a third is obsessed with her self-image, and the fourth is socially awkward.

Still, there is some funny material at the beginning involving Lolo’s body-positive and very graphic art pieces. And when things go completely haywire at a bar and Audrey’s mission is defined, all characters have a chance to play off of each other and develop fully.

Of course, these movies are always based around showing a few outrageous acts. This title does succeed in that department, with a unique take on a sex scene that involves cross-cutting and an entertaining payoff the following day. There is also a fun scenario involving the individuals impersonating a K-Pop band, which earns big laughs.

Additionally, the movie also includes some interesting and unique conflict from an entertaining rivalry between Lolo and Kat. This reviewer can’t think of another movie that features two characters seemingly competing to be the lead’s best friend, and it results in enjoyable bickering between them.

However, the biggest scene-stealer may be the Deadeye character, whose deadpan delivery results in numerous chuckles. The shy figure eventually generates sympathy as she opens up about her struggle to make friends and difficulty fitting in.

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During the final act, the movie does take a more serious turn as Audrey deals with her family history and learns more about where she really came from. There is an incredibly sweet scene, although it feels like a left turn tonally after the series of outrageous events that preceded it. Thankfully, by this time in the story the cast have already charmed viewers enough to accept the shift and emotional stakes as necessary.

I’m not sure that *Joy Ride* is a comedy classic, but it does include a few fresh elements with engaging work from some very funny performers. And, most importantly, a lot of the jokes and off-color humor manages to hit the mark. If you’re looking for some spicy humor at the movies this weekend, then this title is worth a trip to the local theater.

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