

Rating «« out of 4 stars

Here’s a rather unfortunate situation. While every cast member of the new comedy Hot Pursuit is funny, the end result is a mediocre collection of hit-and-miss gags. It delivers a few chuckles during its short running time, but is the type of film that will be completely forgotten when you arrive back home.

Cooper (Reese Witherspoon) is a stiff and officious cop assigned with providing police protection to a man testifying in a high profile drug-trade trial. When mysterious mercenaries show up and fire rounds, Cooper escapes with the witness’ wife, Daniella (Sofia Vergara). The two heroines go it alone when they learn that they may be the targets of not only the crooks, but corrupt policemen as well. This bickering duo form a camaraderie of sorts as they attempt to survive on the run and evade capture.

Unfortunately, early scenes with Cooper do little to inspire audience sympathy. While audience members are repeatedly told that the main character is a cop who just caught a bad break or two, the evidence on display suggests otherwise. She can’t seem to do anything properly (be it use her weapon or climb out a window). That is, except repeat police code rules and regulations. It’s not an engaging character trait and Cooper ultimately comes off as too incompetent to root for.

This isn’t the fault of the performer. In general, the cast are let down by a script that doesn’t give them much opportunity to develop their roles or get into outrageous situations. Instead, it goes for the easy breast gag, menstruation joke or slapstick pratfall. And that’s only part of the problem. They’re forced to behave and deliver the material in such an exaggerated manner that several segments don’t feel particularly relatable or believable. There are also a few ill-timed gags featuring accidental police brutality that are supposed to elicit laughs, but fall incredibly

flat.

That isn’t to say that there are no laughs to be had. The movie opens with an entertaining sequence showing Cooper essentially being raised to adulthood in the back of a police cruiser. Comics Mike Birbiglia and Jim Gaffigan also appear briefly in individual scenes, generating some chuckles as a fearful blind date and a country bumpkin. And the two leads dole out a funny barb here and there. Together, they earn the film’s biggest chuckle by donning a ridiculous disguise in order to sneak past a driver checkpoint.

However, the movie doesn’t produce enough laughs to merit a recommendation. The very small-scale climax feels particularly uninspired and routine, almost as though it was hashed together at the last moment. It’s really too bad, because the two stars have been very amusing in other projects. But simply pairing them up and hoping for the best has resulted in a bland effort. As buddy pictures go, *Hot Pursuit* generates little in the way of comedic sizzle.

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