

'Drive-Away Dolls' won't be the ride of a lifetime, but it's still fun

Written by gallupsun

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Rating: 3 out of 4

Running Time: 84 minutes

This film from Focus Features is now playing exclusively at cinemas.

Since the beginning of their careers, the Coen Brothers have been making movies together and enjoying incredible success with titles like *Raising Arizona*, *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, *No Country for Old Men*

and

The Ballad of Buster Scruggs

(among many other cinematic ventures). But over the past year or two, each has decided to tackle projects on their own. Ethan Coen helmed the Shakespeare adaptation

The Tragedy of Macbeth

a few years back, and now Joel is presenting a quirky comedy called

Drive-Away Dolls

, which he also co-wrote.

The tale follows Marian (Geraldine Viswanathan), a stuffy but shy young woman who has difficulty making friends at work. Still, she does have a few associates whom she spends time with at a local gay bar. One of those is acquaintance Jamie (Margaret Qualley), a free spirit always looking for a good time. Marian reveals to her that she's planning a trip to Tallahassee, Florida using a driveaway vehicle. After her girlfriend (who also happens to be a police officer) Sukie (Beanie Feldstein) discovers Jamie's cheating ways, the panicked betrayer begs Marian to include her on the trip.

Unfortunately, the two women are accidentally given a vehicle containing a hidden briefcase and package. A man known as The Chief (Colman Domingo) wants these items at any cost and sends his two henchmen Arliss (Joey Slotnick) and Flint (C.J. Wilson) to track down the car. Things get complicated for all parties when Jamie continues taking Marian off route.

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Most of the film revolves around two very different pairs of characters getting into comic arguments about their lives and personalities on the road. Jamie is determined to help Marian loosen up, although it's really just an excuse to get herself in the company of potential romantic partners. Her cohort is the other extreme, frequently showing disdain for her pal's random choices and anyone's improper use of the English language. Their bickering doesn't always result in hysterics, but there are some amusing observations and comments that earn chuckles.

Viewers also spend a fair amount of time with the goons, both of whom have very different approaches to their work. One is chatty and tries to eke information out through pleasantries and conversation, while the other is quiet, blunt and threatening. Bored and driving endlessly on a goose-chase through the backroads, they get on each other's nerves as the chattier figure attempts to assert why his technique is more effective. Their conversations with The Chief and random individuals during their quest also earn a few laughs.

If there is something of a minor issue to the entire film, it may be that the protagonists leave on their driving odyssey and are never actually aware of being in any danger through the majority of the running time. Even though their pursuers do commit a very violent act early on, the hoods don't exactly come off as the most competent or dangerous threat, often being sent in the wrong directions by random strangers. Because of this, there is a real lack of tension during much of the proceedings and the movie has to coast a bit on the charm of its leads.

Thankfully, the cast are likable and events take a more urgent tone during the final act when the secret of what the briefcase contains is revealed. All of the bizarre bits involving this plot device are very funny and even feature welcome guest appearances from the likes of Pedro Pascal and Matt Damon. It is a completely unexpected disclosure that leads to a hilarious speech from one of the characters trying to elicit sympathy from the leads over the trials they have experienced as a result.

The movie runs very short, which is probably a plus as the simple, exaggerated characters and emphasis on wild gags wouldn't lend itself to an extended running time. Admittedly, the movie isn't as brilliant as the best films from both Coen Brothers (who will be teaming back up to work on more projects together), but the cast pull every laugh they can out of the material and the film delivers a couple of very memorable moments. Drive-Away Dolls isn't the ride of your life, but it is a reasonably diverting trip.

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