

Sixty to Zero

NASCAR film goes flat after a few laps.

TALLADEGA NIGHTS: THE BALLAD OF RICKY BOBBY: Directed by Adam McKay. Written by Adam McKay and Will Ferrell. Cinematography, Oliver Wood. Music, Anthony Short and Alex Wurman. Starring Will Ferrell, John C. Reilly, Sacha Baron Cohen, Amy Adams, Molly Shannon, Gary Cole, Leslie Bibb, Greg Germann and Jane Lynch. Sony Pictures, 2006. PG-13. 105 minutes.

Closing credits aren't what they used to be. Once the solemn tableau of a film's vast production staff, nowadays end credits whiz by at light speed or list the names of the director's MySpace "friends." (Thank the bloated Kevin Smith and *Clerks II* for the latter.) As if grips and gaffers weren't invisible enough, they now have to sort through a dog-and-pony show just to find their names in the credits.

Increasingly, comedies display their bloopers during end credits, a mostly pleasant trend that dates back to *Cannonball Run* (1981). But when the blooper reels are funnier than the films they're drawn from, it begs the question of whether those movies are worth making. Why not just assemble the actors, add some tequila and turn the cameras on? It's certainly a cheaper alternative to yet another underachieving comedy, like *Nacho Libre* or the new *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*.

Talladega Nights was created by the team who made *Anchorman: The Legend*

of *Ron Burgundy* (2004). In addition to elaborate subtitles, the films share similar arcs: A seriously dumb hero rises to fame, falls hard, then returns to fame a little less dumb than before. I like Will Ferrell, and he deserves a long career; if anything, he's one of the few recent comics to avoid the post-"SNL" curse. I don't like what's arguably his most famous film, *Anchorman*



— it plays like nobody is at the controls — but *Anchorman* is head and shoulders above *Talladega*. If you've seen the trailer for *Talladega*, you've seen everything that's funny in *Talladega*.

Ricky Bobby (Will Ferrell) was born in the backseat of a car going 105 miles per hour, but he's slower than a horse and buggy in the brains department. He isn't, however, the dimmest bulb in this picture. That honor goes to Cal Naughton, Jr. (John C. Reilly), Ricky's friend and sidekick since grade school. When Ricky crashes and can't return to racing, Cal takes over,

and not just on the racetrack: Cal marries Ricky's wife and moves into his estate. But both men are equally helpless before the talents of Jean Girard (Sacha Baron Cohen, "Da Ali G Show"), the gay French driver taking NASCAR by storm. Girard is so good, he reads Camus' *L'Étranger* while driving. Only the combined brains of Ricky and Cal can hope to equal the one brain necessary to unseat Girard.

That *Talladega Nights*, like NASCAR itself, is a blitz of product placements shouldn't surprise us. But *Talladega* becomes what it sets out to ridicule. Some will argue that the film aims to satirize NASCAR's unremitting commercialization, and it's true that some of the film's best moments involve Ricky's sponsorship deals run amok. Ricky can't even say grace before meals without mentioning a certain sports drink. But the fact that *Talladega* contains *an actual commercial* only brings home the point that, satire or not, there are hundreds of product placement deals at work here.

The endorsements wouldn't be so intolerable if *Talladega* had more laughs in it. I don't mind crude, shallow humor. Just keep the jokes coming in waves. The jokes in *Talladega* feel cheap and familiar, rarely elevating the movie above a late-night infomercial. At one point, when Ricky's car windshield gets a sponsor, he can't see past the enormous decal to drive. I know how you feel, Ricky Bobby. It's obscuring my view, too. **EW**

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:
Battle Royale: Controversial, violent Japanese film in which class of young adolescents is kidnapped, drugged and dumped on a deserted island with enough food and water for three days. And a weapon each. Only one will leave alive. R. Bijou LateNite.
Curious George: The Man in the Yellow Hat (Will Ferrell) tries his best to tame Curious George in this animated version of the beloved children's series. Other voices include Drew Barrymore, Eugene Levy, Joan Plowright and Dick Van Dyke. G. Plays only at 10 am Aug. 15 at Movies 12.
DCI Quarterfinals: Drum Corps International competition on the big screen. Plays only at 3 pm Aug. 10 at Cinemark.
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Highly acclaimed film directed by Michel Gondry from screenplay by Charlie Kaufman (*Adaptation*). Joel (Jim Carrey) discovers Clementine (Kate Winslet) had memories of their relationship erased. Now he wants to do the same. Or does he? Very highest recommendations. R. Plays at 7 pm Aug. 11 at Unity of the Valley. Free. **Online archives.**
Hakuchi (The Idiot) (1951): Akira Kurosawa transplants Dostoevsky's novel to post-war Japan. Plays at 7 pm Aug. 15 in 142 Law, UO. Free.
Home Movie Day: Bring in, watch and learn about old 8mm, Super 8 and 16mm home movies on Aug. 12. Film inspection and viewing, 12:30 pm-4:30 pm, Knight Library; "Everyone Needs a Home (Movie)" lecture by Michael Aronson, 5:30 pm, Knight Library; Found footage screening, 7:30 pm, Indigo District (21+ venue). Free.
Lake House, The: Kate (Sandra Bullock) and Alex (Keanu Reeves) are carrying on a correspondence through the mystical mailbox of a house on an Illinois lake — despite living in worlds that are two years apart. Sounds a little corny, but hey, Ebert and Roeper both liked it. PG-13. Movies 12.
Last Atomic Bomb, The: Robert Richter's affecting documentary

combines the stories of people who survived the dropping of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki with interviews, archival footage, propaganda films and more to build an arresting case for why nuclear weapons must never be used again. Plays at 7 pm Aug. 10 in 180 PLC, UO, followed by a Q & A with Richter. Free.
Oregon Festival of American Music: Films featuring the music of this year's focus, Irving Berlin, play at the Shedd Recital Hall throughout the week, including *Holiday Inn* (1942), 10 am Aug. 10, and *Call Me Madam* (1953), 10 am Aug. 11. Free.
Pulse: Kristen Bell ("Veronica Mars") and Ian Somerhalder ("Lost") star as pretty young things being harassed by a nasty virus that doesn't stay online where it belongs. Horror fans, take note: Wes Craven co-wrote the screenplay. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.
Sir! No Sir! David Zieger's important documentary tells the suppressed story of the efforts by thousands of American soldiers to end the Vietnam War. Screens at 11 am Aug. 13 at the Bijou as a fundraiser for the Committee for Countering Military Recruitment. \$6-\$20.
Snakes on a Plane: They're here! Samuel L. Jackson and Julianna Margulies fight reptiles in midair in the summer's most unlikely buzz film. R. Sneak screenings at 10:01 pm and 10:02 pm Aug. 17 at Cinemark.
Step Up: A kid from the wrong side of the tracks brings hip hop to a ballet school — chiefly, to a privileged dancer whose main problem in life is finding a partner for her senior showcase. Goodness! What will happen? PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.
Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory: The 1971 film based on the children's book about the kids who tour a chocolate factory and what happens to those who get sticky fingers. G. Plays with subtitles for the hearing impaired at 9 pm Aug. 11 at Washington Park.
World Trade Center: Oliver Stone directs the story of two policemen, John McLoughlin (Nicolas Cage) and

Will Jimeno (Michael Peña) rescued from the rubble of the World Trade Center on 9/11. With Maggie Gyllenhaal and Maria Bello as the officers' wives. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**
Zoom: Tim Allen leads a team of superpowered young'uns off to fight a supervillain in what's supposedly a *Galaxy Quest*-like satire of, say, some other superpowered young'uns who fight supervillains. With Courteney Cox and Chevy Chase. PG. Cinemark.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

CONTINUING:
Ant Bully, The: Nicolas Cage, Julia Roberts and Meryl Streep lend their voices to the animated tale of a kid shrunk down to bug-height and put to work by the insects he used to torment. PG. Cinemark.
Barnyard: When the farmer's away, the cows will ... order pizzas and throw a party? Don't think too much about this animated feature from the creators of *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*, or you might begin to wonder why the carefree lead cow, Otis (Kevin James) has udders. PG. Cinemark.
Break-Up, The: Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn star in the latest from director Peyton Reed (*Bring It On*) as a Chicago pair who apparently aren't very good at breaking up. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**
Brick: Rian Johnson's debut film, a sharp and witty detective story set in a California high school, stars Joseph Gordon-Levitt (*10 Things I Hate About You*) as a young man caught up in a world of teen crime after the murder of his ex-girlfriend. R. Bijou. **Online archives.**
Da Vinci Code, The: Dan Brown's gazillion-selling book about a centuries-old religious mystery arrives in cinematic form with a glowing pedigree. As if the book isn't popular enough, the adaptation is directed by Ron Howard and stars Tom Hanks. PG-13. Movies 12.

Online archives.
Descent, The: Something really icky attacks a group of women adventuring in Appalachian caves. Director Neil Marshall has said of his film, "It's a bit of a nod and a wink to *Deliverance*." R. Cinemark.
Devil Wears Prada, The: Meryl Streep stars as demanding, high-powered fashion magazine editor Miranda Priestley, whose new assistant (Anne Hathaway) is fresh from college and totally clueless about fashion. Based on Lauren Weisberger's bestselling novel. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**
Fast and the Furious, The:
Tokyo Drift: The series gets a new star in Lucas Black (*Friday Night Lights*), whose character moves to Japan and gets caught up in the underground world of drift racing. PG-13. Movies 12.
Inconvenient Truth, An: Following the 2000 election, Al Gore changed tack, turning his focus to the worldwide crisis that is global warming. Director Davis Guggenheim combines footage of Gore's traveling multimedia presentation on climate crisis with Gore's personal story, creating an effective and engaging film. PG. Bijou. **Online archives.**
John Tucker Must Die: Jesse Metcalfe — whom you may know as the tempting young gardener on "Desperate Housewives" — plays the title character, whose many girlfriends get together to exact revenge on the cheating high school feller. PG-13. Cinemark.
Lady in the Water: Paul Giamatti (*Sideways*) plays a building super who finds, in the building's pool, a creature called a "narf" (seriously) who needs to get back to her world. Supposedly, the first film from writer-director M. Night Shyamalan (*The Sixth Sense*) to not hinge on a plot twist. PG-13. Cinemark. **Online archives.**
Miami Vice: Director Michael Mann (*The Insider*), who executive produced the original "Miami Vice" TV series, brings a darker version to the big screen. Colin Farrell and Jamie Foxx star as detectives Crockett and Tubbs, who are

deeply involved in undercover work. Naomie Harris and Gong Li costar. R. Cinemark. Cinema World.
Monster House: Three kids face off against a creepy neighborhood house that's something other than haunted. With the voices of Maggie Gyllenhaal, Steve Buscemi and Jon Heder. PG. Cinemark (with 3-D showings also). **Online archives.**
My Super Ex-Girlfriend: Matt (Luke Wilson) breaks up with his needy girlfriend Jenny (Uma Thurman) only to find she's got superpowers. And she's going to use them against him. Because women are crrrrazy! PG-13. Movies 12.
Night Listener, The: Toni Collette and Robin Williams star in this adaptation of a novel by Amistead Maupin, about a radio show host who develops a by-phone friendship with a young boy (Rory Culkin). Strange circumstances make the boy's tale seem a bit less than likely. R. Cinema World. Cinemark.
Over the Hedge: A gang of woodland creatures wakes up from their winter hibernation to find a big green thing has appeared in their world. On the other side, they hear, wacky creatures called "humans" exist. Bruce Willis, William Shatner and Steve Carrell are among those voicing critters. PG. Movies 12.
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest: Johnny Depp reprises his role as over-the-top swash-buckler Jack Sparrow in the second *Pirates* film, which we rather fervently hope is as entertaining as the first. Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley are the in-love eye candy — actually, it's a toss-up as to which of the three leads is prettiest. With Bill Nighy all betentacled as watery bad guy Davy Jones. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World. **Online archives.**
Prairie Home Companion, A: Director Robert Altman and writer Garrison Keillor present a winning story about the imagined death of Keillor's radio classic, "A Prairie Home Companion" (still going strong in real life). A first-rate ensemble cast, including Keillor, Meryl Streep, Lindsay Lohan, Kevin Kline, Lily Tomlin, Woody

Harrelson and Tommy Lee Jones, makes the film sparkle. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**
RV: In Barry Sonnenfeld's latest film, Robin Williams tells his family they're going on vacation to Hawaii — but instead packs his wife and kids into an RV and heads to Colorado. Jeff Daniels heads up a wacky bunch of full-time campers. It's a sure bet there are hijinks involved. PG-13. Movies 12.
Scanner Darkly, A: Richard Linklater (*Before Sunset*) adapts Philip K. Dick's novel about addiction. Live performances were filmed, then painted over for a trippy, surreal look that works well with the film's themes of identity confusion and paranoia, but the story is a bit distant. R. Bijou. **Online archives.**
Scoop: Woody Allen's second shot-in-London film keeps the star of *Match Point*, Scarlett Johansson, here playing a young journalist uncovering the story of a lifetime. Hugh Jackman, freed from his Wolverine getup, is her potentially dangerous love interest. PG-13. Cinema World. **Online archives.**
Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby: Will Ferrell and NASCAR. What more do you need to know? OK, well, Ricky Bobby (Ferrell) and his racing partner face a new challenge when a French Formula One driver (Sacha Baron Cohen) arrives on the scene. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**
X-Men: The Last Stand: The third X-Men movie combines the loved-by-fans "Dark Phoenix" storyline with the discovery of a "cure" for mutancy. Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry, Famke Janssen and the rest of the core cast return (sans Nightcrawler, oddly). Stay through the credits for a vital scene. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**
You, Me and Dupree: Kate Hudson and Matt Dillon star as a newly married couple whose new life together takes a sharp turn when perpetual bachelor Dupree (perpetual scene-stealer Owen Wilson) crashes at their place. But it's just for a little while. Right? PG-13. Cinemark.