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**movies** BY JASON BLAIR

*Hot Rod: Alas, not crazy delicious*



**ROD KIMBLE STUNTMAN**

**Crash, Burn**

Stuntman comedy is a total wreck

**HOT ROD:** Directed by Akiva Schaffer. Written by Pam Brady. Cinematography, Andrew Dunn. Music, Trevor Rabin. Starring Andy Samberg, Isla Fisher, Will Arnett, Sissy Spacek and Ian McShane. Paramount Pictures, 2006. PG-13. 88 minutes. ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Rod, once his stepfather is healthy, can finally earn Frank's respect by beating him silly. That's right, kids: Rod want to save Frank so he can kill him. If it wasn't so inconceivably un-funny, I would call *Hot Rod* an offensive piece of garbage. As it is, it's just garbage.

**G**rowing up, the universe of male hero worship divided roughly along these coordinates: G.I. Joe for the boy scouts and future quarterbacks, Luke Skywalker for the floppy-haired soccer-player types; and Evel Knievel for the guys with bad skin who cut class. While I probably fell into the middle group, the relative merits of each archetype were constantly up for debate, which might explain my fascination with Robert "Evel" Knievel. The original motorcycle daredevil, Knievel lived a life — a series of horrific crashes and jail terms, each increasing his popularity — that cried out like a siren for parody, a call answered to perfection in the 1980s by the *Bizarre* program's Super Dave Osborne. Like Knievel, Osborne had a flair for disastrous mishaps — only in Osborne's case, the injuries produced laughs, not blood.

Save your letters, fans of *Hot Rod*, telling me to lighten up. I realize that stupidity, once the object of good comedy, is now the only subject we have, the *ne plus ultra* of films that are made to make us laugh. But the fact that McShane (*Deadwood*), an accomplished if unknown actor, appears in *Hot Rod* only legitimizes the Will-Ferrelization of comedic films, in which an inept dreamer puts smarter people in their place. (The fact that Sissy Spacek appears in *Hot Rod* as Rod's mother boggles the mind entirely.) The film has the tossed-together quality of home movies made by 5th graders after school. Rod's journey is not only dull, it's overwhelmingly and irredeemably stupid.

**As funny as getting your hand smashed in a car door.**

In our time, the current crop of "motivated moron" comedies — *Anchor Man* and *Zoolander*, for example — might seem the perfect format for the story of Rod Kimble (Andy Samberg), a moped-riding daredevil nitwit with big dreams but not much else. Unfortunately, *Hot Rod's* premise happens to be its fatal wound, resulting in a film that is almost as funny as getting your hand smashed in a car door. Even now, hours later, I still find Rod's motivation a little sad: In order to save his hated stepfather Frank (Ian McShane), Rod must raise \$50,000 so that

Along the way, Denise (Isla Fisher, the crazed redhead from *Wedding Crashers*) and a trio of friends serve faithfully as Rod's crew. Other than Denise, the male trio serve very little purpose: Compared to Seth Rogan's friends in *Knocked Up*, these guys have the cumulative personality of a donut. *Hot Rod*, in short, is more than a bad movie. It's an insult to all the bad movies ever made. It's a trickless one-trick pony that should have been euthanized in the development stage. Even the grand finale — Rod's attempt to jump 15 buses, one more than Knievel's record — doesn't deliver the thrills it could. Does Rod make it? Sort of. Does it matter? **EW**

*Hot Rod ends Thursday, Aug. 16, at Cinemark and VRC Stadium 15, but most likely it will return to Movies 12 eventually. Do contain your excitement.*

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