

REEL REVIEWS

★ ★ *Can't Buy Me Love* *Oaks Four West*

The problem with a lot of movies is that actors always want to play characters that are nice, so people will like them. Even villains are frequently portrayed as magnetic and charming.

What's refreshing about *Can't Buy Me Love* is that the hero, Ronald Miller (marvelously played by Patrick Dempsey), wins our sympathies and then spends a considerable amount of time acting like a complete jerk.

Ronald has a few good friends, but they're definitely not the "in" crowd. He and his buddies keep those embarrassing pen holders in their shirt pockets, are effectively separated from the rest of the students by being in the advanced classes and go to every football game ... but sit in the visitor's section.

Ronald chafes under the stereotype of nerd, and he burns to be popular. That may be putting it mildly, for Ronald sets his sights on the Holy Grail of high school: the captain of the cheerleading squad, Cindy Mancini (Amanda Peterson).

But when Cindy accidentally ruins an extremely expensive dress of her mom's — which she borrowed without asking — Ronald sees his chance. He

convinces Cindy to take his money to buy a replacement. In exchange, Ronald will "rent" her for one month to be his girlfriend, thereby gaining the popularity he's been longing for.

Ronald quickly gains confidence and, with the help of Cindy, some fashion sense, and he soon ingratiates himself with the cool crowd.

But more changes than his outfits. Ronald finds less and less time for his old buddies. He becomes glib, facile and more popular than he ever imagined possible. And just as Cindy begins to find herself genuinely attracted to him, Ronald becomes convinced that he's really as terrific as people think he is.

Dempsey is exceptional as Ronald, and Peterson is also quite good as Cindy. But they are hampered by a slow beginning and incessant moralizing. Plus, Ronald and Cindy are surrounded by vapid stereotypes nowhere near as interesting as they.

And when the relatively intelligent script stoops to a running gag about flatulence, we're left with one conclusion: they didn't listen to their own advice. *Can't Buy Me Love* would rather be popular than sincere.

By Michael Giltz