

★ ★ ½ Planes, Trains
and Automobiles

Plus

This is a new movie made the old-fashioned way: with style, wit, a warm little message and a big dollop of sentimentality.

Planes, Trains and Automobiles is a tale about Neal Page (Steve Martin), a dapper, reserved businessman who wants nothing

more than to fly home for Thanksgiving. But his plane is delayed and then rerouted. So he decides to take the train. But it runs out of steam. So he rents a car. But it explodes.

Yes, danger dogs the path of Neal, but none more frightening than blustery Del Griffith (John Candy), a noisy showering salesman who manages to steer Neal wrong every step of the way. If Del says, "Go right," you can be sure you'd better go left.

But Neal is an amiable fellow and everything Del suggests seems reasonable until disaster strikes. Perhaps the biggest disaster of all is Del himself, an overbearingly friendly guy, the type of fellow who accosts you on a plane and never lets up. You'd like to tell him to bug off but, well, he's nice and you don't want to hurt his feelings.

Neither does Neal. He remains unflappable until an early scene in a hotel room where Del's scratching, burping, throat-clearing and other grating habits finally push him over the edge.

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over the edge.

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That's when Neal cuts loose, venting all his anger at this hapless stranger who is so innocently messing up his life. Both actors are on the mark the

entire movie, but this is where they shine. Martin explodes with pent-up energy in a hilarious tirade that voices everything we've secretly thought about Del.

We can't help laughing, but we catch ourselves feeling guilty because the pain in Del's eyes is so apparent. This is Candy's first real role and he makes the most of it, playing Del with a sweet but honest intensity; he knows Del can be annoying but he likes him anyway.

After Neal sputters to a finish, Candy delivers a sweet little speech in which Del defends himself quietly and with dignity.

It's a wonderful scene, the type that lets you sit back and think, "Yes, this movie is going to be good." But Writer/Director John Hughes never capitalizes on it. He lets the characters revert to their antagonistic relationship as they muddle their way through one predictable transportation problem after another.

There's another honest scene near the end, but Hughes cheats again on the climax. There is a tearful reunion between Page and his wife, an incidental character who speaks all of 10 lines in the movie. Like Del Griffith, we can only stand in the background smiling distractedly.

And like Del Griffith, *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* has its problems. It has a playful score fraught with inappropriate rock music, a predictable story and a sappy ending. But Martin and Candy are wonderful, they manage to be funny most of the time and its heart is in the right place and, well, it's nice. And I don't want to be the one to hurt its feelings.

By Michael Giltz