

# Francis 'Ford' Coppola revs his vehicle

★ ★ ★ Tucker  
Oaks Four West

Francis Ford Coppola is the brilliant director at the helm of such masterpieces as *The Conversation* and *The Godfather*. Francis Coppola is the hired gun who has been paying off debts by stamping his name on *The Cotton Club* and *Gardens of Stone*, among others.

Ironically, the "Ford" has returned for the first time in many years with a story about the auto industry. No one has picked up on this, but then *Tucker* is not a movie that rewards careful viewing.

It's a snazzy, jazzy little piece of entertainment about Preston Tucker, an inventor who built an innovative car that could have given the Big Three a run for their money — if he had stayed in business.

History has judged Tucker a canny self-promoter and a bad businessman, but Coppola sees in the tale a moral about the little guy with a big idea and the people this can frighten.

Not that this movie is given to much reflection. It glides along with a handshake and a grin. Coppola even tacitly recognizes this by coyly announcing the whole affair to be a promotional film for Tucker Auto.

Jeff Bridges is jauntily wonderful in the title



Jeff Bridges makes driving fun in the festive *Tucker*

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role. With his hand cocked at his side, he sells himself to the public, the press and even his own family.

He is surrounded by a marvelous cast, with great turns by Lloyd Bridges as a ruthless senator and Martin Landau as Tucker's friend and business partner.

But the soul of the film can be found in Coppola's direction. He created a unique set design so that locations like the Tucker Auto plant and a city hall are literally side by side. Thus, characters saunter from one scene to another and people talking to each other on the phone can be filmed standing only a few feet

apart.

Coppola pioneered these techniques in *On From The Heart* and, at the time, they were seen as little more than studio trickery. In *Tucker*, they certainly create a heightened sense of reality.

More importantly, Coppola seems to relish trying out his ideas on a truly commercial piece. *See?* he seems to say. *I wasn't just fooling around. This stuff really works!*

And it's precisely *because* Coppola wants it to work that the movie never manages to be more than sweetness and light. He's got the flashy exterior. It's the engine that's missing.

By Michael Gilt