

'Cars 3' sputters on its way to the finish line

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 16 June 2017 03:23



Rating: «« out of 4

Running Time: 109 min.

Well, if nothing else, it certainly looks great. *Cars 3*, the newest from Pixar, is an admittedly slick little vehicle that will most certainly impress the young tykes. Unfortunately, this reviewer hasn't been seven years old in a very, very long time. Despite the incredible animation on display, the story offers significantly less to anyone standing over four feet in height.

Lightning McQueen (Owen Wilson) begins to feel long in the tooth when younger vehicles like Jackson Storm (Armie Hammer) arrive and take the championship from him. Desperate to continue, Lightning begins working with new sponsor Sterling (Nathan Fillion) and attempts to take advantage of advancements in racing technology.

He forges a tenuous relationship with trainer Cruz Ramirez (Cristela Alonzo), who wanted to be a racer but couldn't find the courage to compete. When early exercises fail to get the desired results, Lightning seeks alternative methods, attempting to find Smokey (Chris Cooper), the original trainer of his previous crew chief, Doc Hudson (Paul Newman).

There's a clear attempt here to follow the style of the original film. However, it can't help but feel a little flat and stale. *Cars 2* may have had its flaws, but at least it attempted to do something different, adding new locales and Formula 1 into the mix, as well as an elaborate spy plot. This new picture doesn't really have much of anything to offer in the way of drama, which may ultimately be its biggest issue. Yes, Lightning does struggle with whether or not to retire and Cruz needs encouragement to achieve her dreams, but these aren't compelling, life-or-death

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stakes. As a result, there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of tension, leaving this entry feeling a bit, well, dull.

Despite the subject matter of aging being less than relatable to young ones, when the cars zip around the track, the movie shifts into gear and kids will be enraptured. The point-of-view stays low to the pavement on the race track, moving around the many vehicles and adding a bit of punch to the proceedings. Equally stunning are the background environments. All of them, from the desert to the beaches to the mountains, look almost photorealistic. If I was giving my rating based solely on the visuals, it would be much higher.

Alas, the story is just as important as a film's looks; in this case it just didn't do much for me. It's focused on Lightning and Cruz exclusively and there is little else going on. The comic relief from Radiator Spring residents and other cast members isn't sharply written. A couple of deadpan visual gags are amusing, but the one liners are blunt and most are of the eye-rolling variety. The events are very predictable and considering the length of the feature, it all appears drawn out.

And while one appreciates the positive messages being relayed about believing in yourself and finding a new direction in life, other moments feel ill-advised. At one point, Lightning gives a speech to his new sponsor, announcing, "I don't want to cash in..." on past successes. The second sequel (not even counting a spin-off feature) of a heavily marketed franchise probably isn't the best place to try and make this point.

Personally, I know that I'm not the target audience. Kids will generally enjoy the fast cars on display and on that basis, I think they'd give the movie a solid 3 out of 4 (or perhaps even more). As for me, I found myself less-than-engaged and won't remember much about this follow-up. I'd probably rank it a 2. So, I'll split the difference with my final rating. In the end, *Cars 3* may look impressive, but its engine isn't firing on all cylinders.

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