

## DVD Review: Jeff Bridges Sticks to Old Tricks in 'A Dog Year'

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on December 8, 2010 - 9:04am

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CHICAGO – “A Dog Year” flew under everyone’s radar when it debuted on HBO in September 2009, mere months before its lead actor went on to win the Oscar for Best Actor. Now headlining two of the most anticipated films of the 2010 winter movie season, Jeff Bridges is bigger than ever. But will that make audiences any more interested in checking out this forgotten “Dog”?

It’s difficult to believe this gentle drama was originally televised on HBO, since it’s hardly up to the channel’s formidable quality standards. This picture would feel more at home on a “Lifetime for Men” channel featuring feel-good bromances, tear-jerking sports dramas, and the occasional dose of Betty White. With its overly polished cinematography and blatantly manipulative score, this project could’ve become a mawkish dud in the hands of a lesser actor.



DVD Rating: **3.0/5.0**

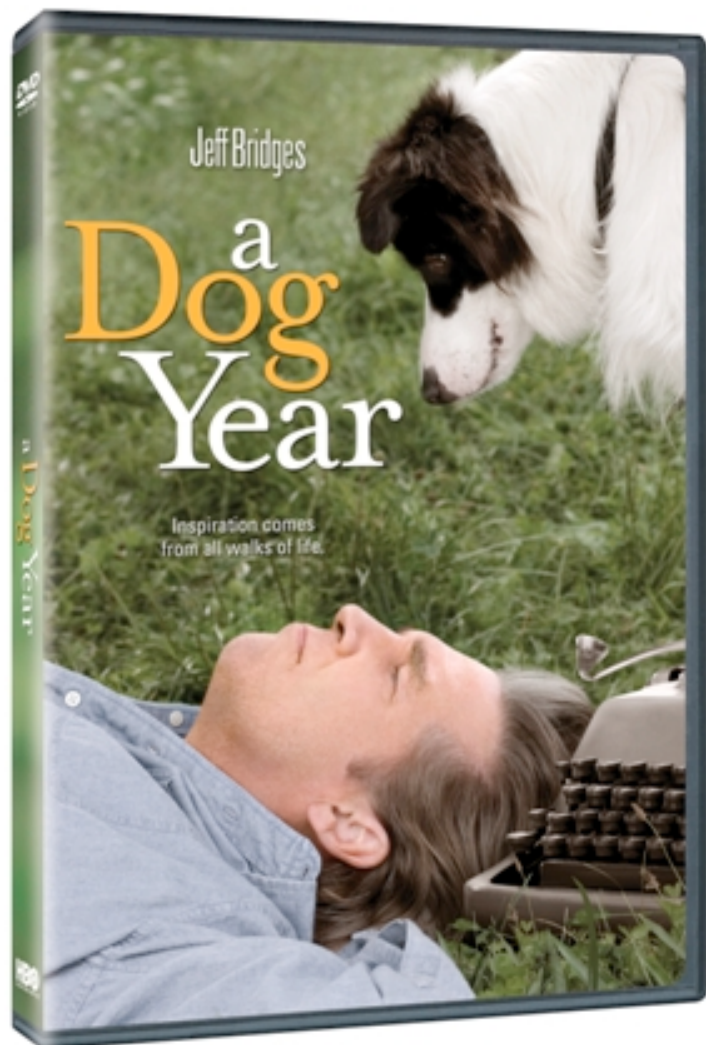
Though Bridges has turned in decades of great work, he’s still best known to modern audiences for his role as the Dude in “The Big Lebowski.” The slacker extraordinaire was a timeless movie character that set the tone for Bridge’s career thereafter, leading all the way up to his acclaimed portrayal of down-and-out country star Bad Blake in “Crazy Heart.” Blake is not a whole lot different from Bridges’ character in “Dog.” He’s Jon Katz, a bestselling author who’s become detached from his family, disinterested in his work, and devoid of the discipline necessary to put forth any effort in life. Bridges could play this character in his sleep, but his performance is anything but on autopilot. He’s such a good actor that none of his efforts are ever visible. His low-key approach to characterization is what makes him an ideal choice to embody characters who are so withdrawn that they barely seem present. Yet there’s always a great deal going on beneath the surface of his work. He can say more in a small gesture than some actors can when armed with show-stopping monologues. It’s easier to take a performer like Bridges for granted when he makes acting look as easy breathing.



Jeff Bridges star in George LaVoo's A Dog Year.

Photo credit: HBO Home Entertainment

Based on Katz's memoir, the film offers a less-than-sympathetic portrait of the author as he struggles with writer's block, a midlife crisis, and a profoundly unruly border collie. As he attempts to tame his newly adopted pet, the obstreperous canine repeatedly breaks free of his master's grasp and darts through the door. It's to the credit of first-time feature director George LaVoo that the tune, "Who Let the Dogs Out?" is never once heard on the soundtrack. Many of the early scenes simply consist of an incredulous Katz yelping, "What?" as he witnesses his dog getting into all sorts of mischief. After a visit from his concerned daughter (a wasted Lauren Ambrose, so wonderful in "Starting Out in the Evening"), Katz decides to move to a supposedly secluded farmhouse where the film's running gag becomes clear: no matter where this antisocial recluse goes, life always comes knocking.



A Dog Year was released on DVD on Dec. 7, 2010.

Photo credit: HBO Home Entertainment

LaVoo is best known for writing the "Real Women Have Curves" teleplay, and his penchant for pleasing crowds is never in doubt, yet he never quite succumbs to the cutesy sentiment that marred films such as "Marley & Me." Not much is revealed about Katz's backstory, which allows Bridges the freedom to illuminate aspects of his character simply through wordless nuances. There's a moment when Katz stares at himself in the bathroom mirror, and his weathered, vaguely guarded face begins to resemble that of his dog, who was abused by his former owner, and is making its first hesitant steps toward reconnecting with the world. At a brisk running time barely clocking in at 80 minutes, the film is not a moment too long, and the conclusion is genuinely touching. By disciplining his dog, Katz is disciplining himself. It's a simple idea and a simple movie, but Bridges makes it worthwhile.

"A Dog Year" is presented in its 16:9 aspect ratio and accompanied by English, French and Spanish audio tracks. The sole extra is a three-minute featurette that doesn't allow viewers to get any closer to knowing the real Jon Katz. Animal trainer Matilda de Cagny says that she had less than ten weeks to train the animals, who were so well behaved that they had to be coached in the art of crazy (sounds like a devolution of sorts). Bridges likens acting with animals to working with a special effect, and says that the trick is to get them to engage in behavior that nature might deem unnatural.

*'A Dog Year' is released by HBO Home Entertainment and stars Jeff Bridges, Lauren Ambrose, Lois Smith, Domhnall Gleeson and Karen Allen. It was written and directed by George LaVoo. It was released on Dec. 7th, 2010. It is rated TV-PG.*



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