TV Review: Tim Allen Sinks to Idiocy & Beyond in ‘Last Man Standing’

Submitted by mattmovieman [1] on October 11, 2011 - 7:27am

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CHICAGO – There’s something inherently unmanly about the need to prove one’s own manliness. What passes for virility in the mind of Mike Baxter (Tim Allen) is clearly masking a deep well of insecurity. He never passes up an opportunity to prove that he is, in fact, a man. And he can’t understand why every other man on the planet doesn’t follow in step. “I love sausage!,” he growls. “I love bacon!” What a man.

And what a putridly pitiful excuse for a sitcom. In a season where no rookie show is safe, “Last Man Standing” may in fact be the first that is cancelled mid-episode. Viewers may be pleased to see the atrocious pilot interrupted by an old rerun of “Home Improvement,” since that program will forever represent the golden era of ’90s idol Allen. It wasn’t a very good show, but it did provide a worthy showcase for the actor’s dim-witted yet lovable persona.



Television Rating: **1.0**/**5.0**

Sadly, there is absolutely nothing lovable about Mike “The Uber Male” Baxter. He’s a sour grouch with a dash of Archie Bunker, but the audience is asked to feel for him since he’s stuck in a house with his wife, Vanessa (Nancy Travis), and three daughters. He doesn’t feel truly at home unless he’s on the road working for a sporting goods store named, “Outdoor Man,” though “Dick’s” might’ve been more appropriate. His boss (Hector Elizondo) is such a hardcore man that he takes pleasure in hazing employees and smashing the windows of wrongly parked cars with a golf club. One of the boss’s victims is plucky newbie Kyle (Christoph Sanders), who tries desperately to impress the higher-ups. After Mike enters his prized den of men and exclaims, “Smell the balls in here!” Kyle takes a long, spirited whiff. Ho ho ho.



Alexandra Krosney, Hector Elizondo, Nancy Travis, Tim Allen, Kaitlyn Dever and Molly Ephraim star in ABC’s Last Man Standing.

Photo credit: ABC

Immediately following this priceless moment, Mike gives Kyle the task of looking after his unmarried daughter’s baby. Why doesn’t he put the baby in daycare like a responsible human being with the merest semblance of a brain? Because the local daycare center is run by one of those unsightly hippie stereotypes that only exists in quirky sitcoms. Upon hearing Mike refer to the kid as “champ,” the tie-died twerp scolds him by saying, “Champ implies victory over another person.” This is the sort of punchline only Tea Partiers would find topical.

When Mike’s not bashing “Obamacare” and mocking gay pride parades, he’s bumbling through failed conversations with his perpetually pouting, door-slamming daughters. One even lets out a Sally Struthers-like whine when her father neglects to understand her all-encompassing passion for “Glee.” All that’s missing is a Jean Stapleton stand-in required to make pointed remarks seemingly by accident while showering Mike with inexplicable love. Yet the warmly tolerant Vanessa is not a ditz, and it remains a mystery what she could possibly see in the man she married. He’s the kind of father routinely avoided by his kin on Thanksgiving.



Last Man Standing premieres at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 11 on ABC .

Photo credit: ABC

And yet, it’s obvious creator Jack Burditt (who is, amazingly enough, a longtime writer for “30 Rock”) plans to contrive some eventual warm and fuzzy moments as Mike finds himself grounded at work, thus keeping him around the estrogen-filled house for longer than he’d like. Faced with the assignment of increasing his business’s presence on the new age doohickey known as the Internet, Mike records a bitter tirade about the general lack of testosterone in modern times that instantly becomes a viral hit.

John Pasquin, a longtime TV director who helmed several Allen vehicles (the best of which remains “The Santa Clause”), approaches this material as if he were staging an amateur production of “Defending the Caveman.” The comic timing is consistently off and unaided by the canned laughter, which is so soulless and unmotivated that it kills every potential chuckle in its midst. But that’s okay, considering there aren’t any good chuckles to be had. It’s as if Pasquin forgot what made Allen such a likable screen presence in the first place.

Mike isn’t thick-headed in a way that’s endearing or authentic. His ignorance is just plain insufferable. That’s partly due to the simple fact that Allen doesn’t have the depth to explore the scathingly satirical and hauntingly poignant terrain once charted by Carroll O’Connor in “All in the Family.” Yet this painfully shallow sitcom (originally titled “Man Up”) gives him absolutely nothing to work with. He’s better off voicing Buzz Lightyear and narrating “Pure Michigan” commercials than wasting his time with this dreck. It’s frankly amazing that ABC picked this show up at all, since outdated laugh track humor is often confined to TV Land (this show could easily compete with “Hot in Cleveland” for the title of Least Funny Modern Sitcom). If the once-beloved actor continues with this junk, it won’t be long before people start asking, “When did Tim Allen turn into Bill Engvall?”

Incidentally, as I watched Mike rant about how real men never hire professionals to get their work done, my neighbor across the street was digging up his own yard to fix a broken water line. He ended up hitting a gas line and nearly blew the block sky high. What a man.

‘Last Man Standing,’ which airs on ABC, stars Tim Allen, Nancy Travis, Kaitlyn Dever, Molly Ephraim, Alexandra Krosney, Christoph Sanders and Hector Elizondo. The show was created by Jack Burditt. It premieres on Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2011 at 7PM CST.


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Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 29 2024 - 2:00am*):
http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/15984/tv-review-tim-allen-sinks-to-idiocy-and-beyond-in-last-man-standing

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