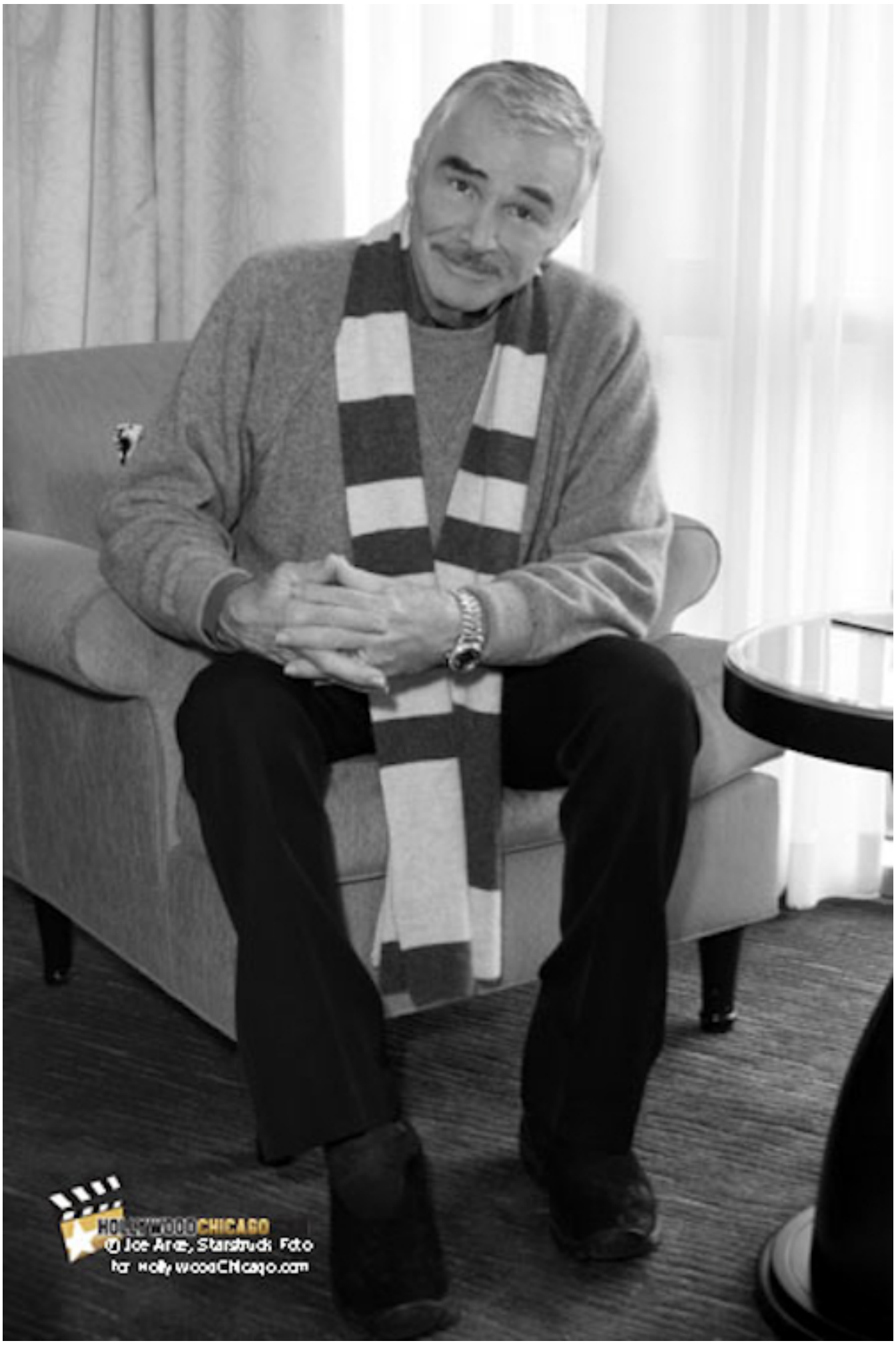
Film Feature: HollywoodChicago.com Remembers Burt Reynolds

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on October 9, 2018 - 10:26am

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CHICAGO – The Bandit. Gator. The Man Who Loved Women. Jack Horner. Burt Reynolds played all these roles, in a roller coaster career that encompassed three eras of film and television. Reynolds died last month at age 82, taking with him a different breed of movie star, one that stole a scene with a self assured wink, mischievous smile and high pitched laugh.

Burt's on-screen career began in 1958, and he had the distinction of being a regular on a hit TV show ("Gunsmoke") in the 1960s, a movie star in the 1970s ("Smokey and the Bandit") and '80s, and then back to TV (winning an Emmy for "Evening Shade), before getting his only Oscar nomination for "Boogie Nights." His later career was notable for essentially being Burt Reynolds, as his second generation fans went on to produce shows like "Archer," where Burt voices himself as Burt, and despite being named a different character in "The Last Movie Star" (2017), it was all pure Burtness. For the complete HollywoodChicago.com obituary of Burt Reynolds, click here. [22]



Burt Reynolds, 1936-2018
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

For this special tribute HollywoodChicago.com contributors Patrick McDonald, Spike Walters and Jon Lennon Espino write of their favorite Burt Reynolds films, along with a guest contributor, New York State screenwriter David Wilson. Also included is the story of the the creator/producer of “Smokey and the Bandit,” Robert L. Levy, with photographs from his personal collection.

DELIVERANCE (1972) by Patrick McDonald



Deliverance
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

When Ronald Reagan's film career was in decline, he became obsessed with his performance in "King's Row" (1942). He thought he deserved an Oscar nomination, and would screen it over and over. Burt Reynolds had his own King's Row, the powerful and weirdly unforgettable "Deliverance." Adapted from a James Dickey novel and directed by John Boorman, it was Reynold's favorite character and performance, especially in his later years when reminding people of his chops as an actor. Four friends – portrayed by Reynolds, Jon Voight, Ned Beatty and Ronny Cox – take a canoe trip in the remote Georgia wilderness, only to encounter the local mountain men. Reynolds portrays Lewis Medlock, an experienced outdoorsman who represents the morality of survival, and he did it without his trademark mustache. It is a performance coiled with both righteous strength and entitled anarchy.

Although Boorman and the film itself was nominated for Academy Awards, Reynolds and the other actors were snubbed. It ate at Burt for the rest of his life, and he often theorized that his goofy centerfold for Cosmopolitan magazine might have been the factor that denied him the nomination. If anything, it was the best performance of the second phase of his career, after his early television roles and before superstardom as the Burt image. The film was also preserved in 2008 by the U.S. National Film Registry in the LIbrary of Congress.

ALL PURE BURTNESS: In a interview with Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com in 2011, Reynolds named John Boorman his favorite director because… "He takes chances, but he takes the same chances that you do. When we went down that river in a canoe, which we had no business going down, he was in a canoe right beside us. We also shot it all in sequence. And I remember one day I said to John, 'This is great, shooting it in sequence. Why don't they do more pictures like this?' And he said, 'this is in case one of you drowns.'

THE CANNONBALL RUN (1981) by Spike Walters

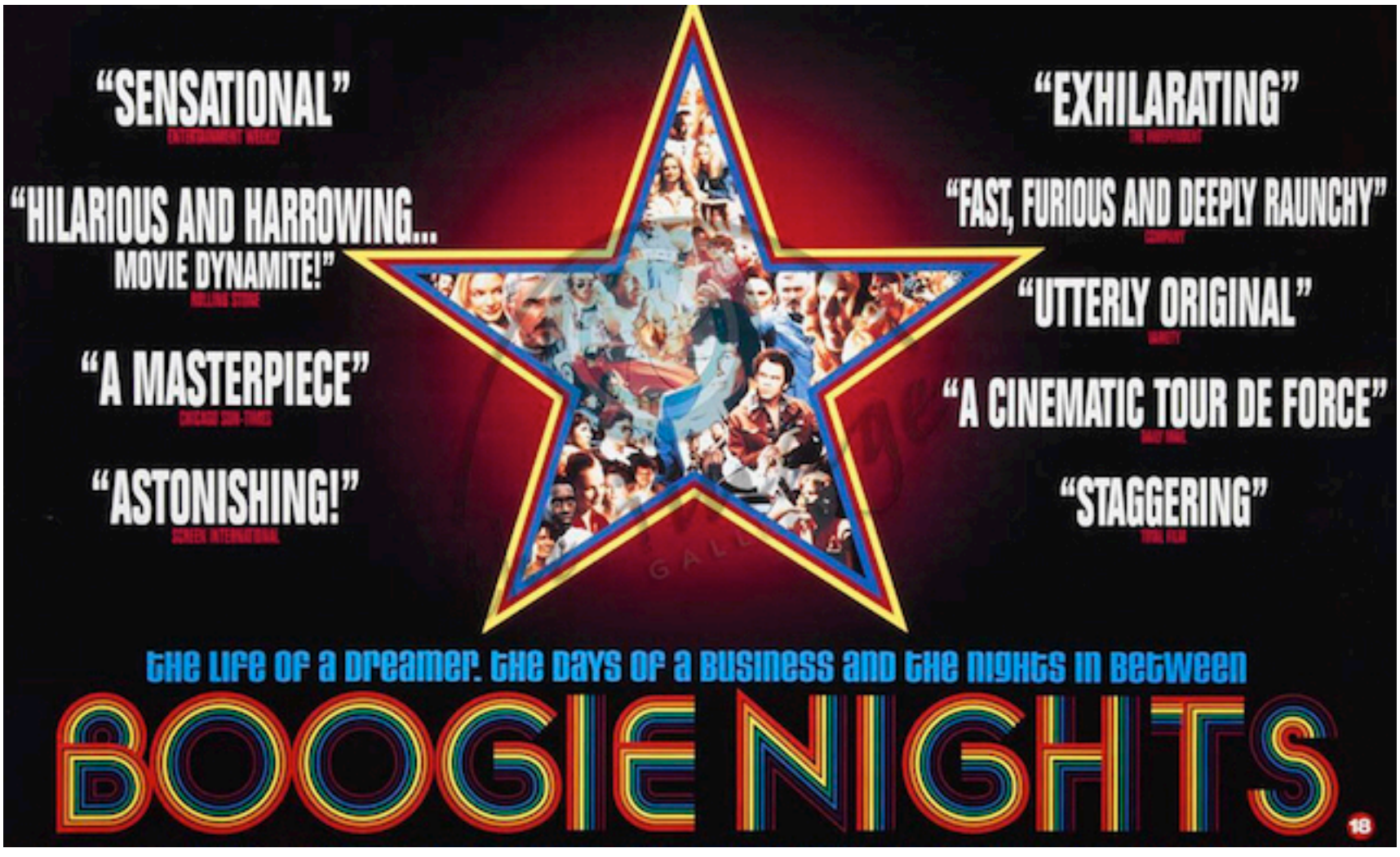


The Cannonball Run
Photo credit: HBO Video

For my six year old self, "The Cannonball Run" was the epitome of what I, as a child, referred to as Burt Reynolds' "car stuff movies." Essentially it's one big car chase with a celebrity-roast-worthy cavalcade of stars, and the film would find Reynolds (as J.J. McClure) coasting on a smirk and a distinctive laugh all the way to bank. Reynolds treats the whole film as one big goof, and this would mark the last time the public would come out in droves for this particular brand of Burt. The celebrity walk-ons – including Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin as priests, and that era's James Bond, Roger Moore, playing Roger Moore – are the closest thing the film has to jokes, but Dom DeLuise has a costumed alter-ego (Captain Chaos) so that's something. Even Reynolds can't seem to believe he's getting paid for this, and we're invited along for the ride, which was one I thoroughly enjoyed at the time. But admittedly now, "The Cannonball Run" makes "Smokey and the Bandit" looks like Masterpiece Theatre.

ALL PURE BURTNESS: J.J. McCLURE: When you don't want him he's around! When you want him he's not around! I'm gonna go get a beer! CAPTAIN CHAOS: DA-DA-DUM!

BOOGIE NIGHTS (1997) by Jon Lennon Espino



Boogie Nights
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

Burt Reynolds will always be an American badass. He effortlessly exuded the cowboy swagger and sex appeal that made us both want to be him or want to be with him. He is always magnetic in every role, even the ones he's not the star of, which was the case with "Boogie Nights." It's hard to believe that he turned down the role seven times. Although Marky Mark (Wahlberg) was technically the lead in the film, it was Reynolds who stole the focus as porn director Jack Horner. His performance in this film was dynamic, but also unexpected as he plays a character atypical to anything he had done before (or would ever do again). The depth to his character is the evident culmination of every role he had played before. "Smokey and the Bandit" is the film he will always be remembered for, but his polar opposite transformation in "Boogie Nights" shows his true range, to the point that it earned him an Academy Award nomination.

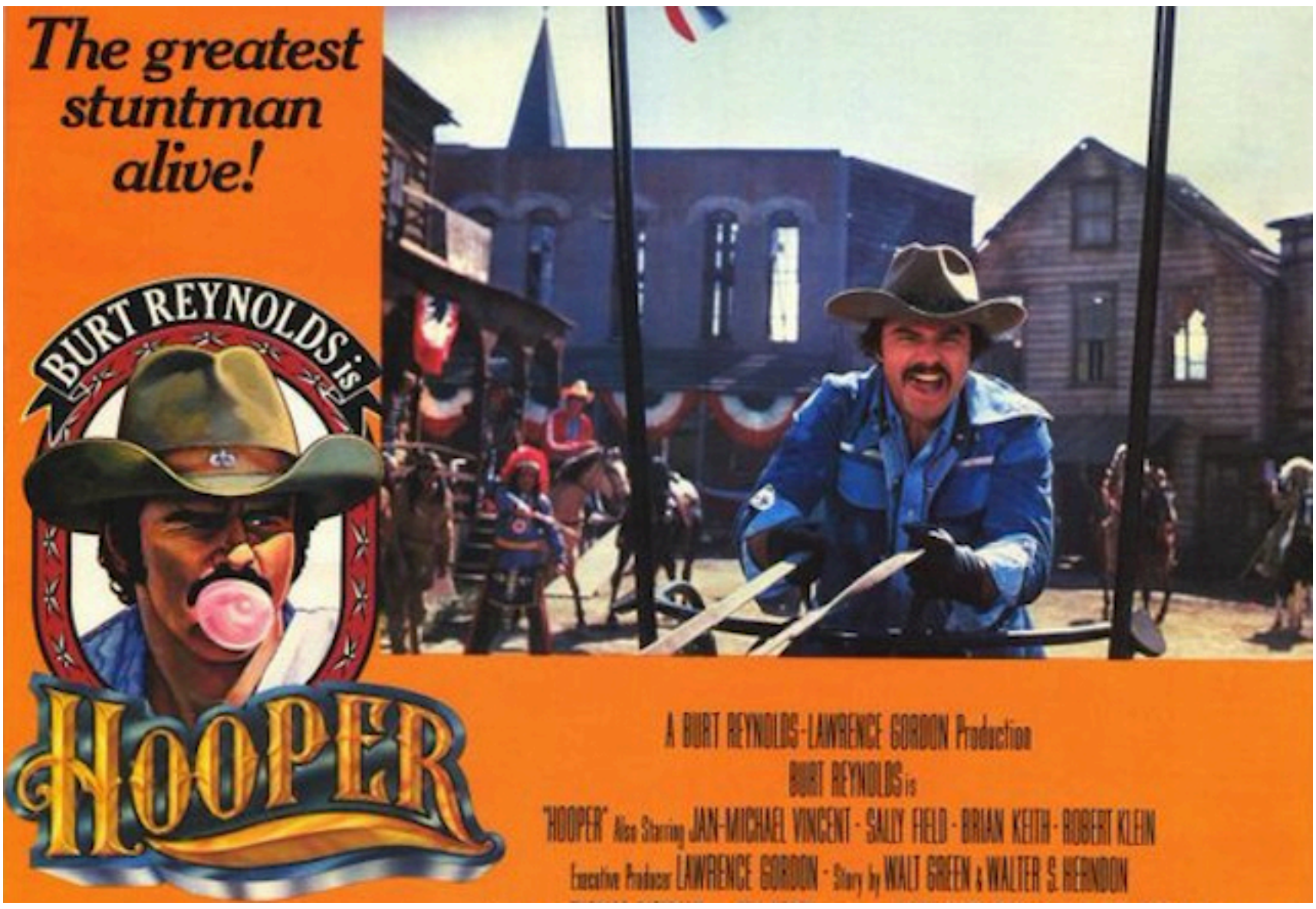
ALL PURE BURTNESS: There's a powerful scene in "Boogie Nights" where Reynolds as Jack Horner is with Mark Wahlberg's Dirk Diggler in a diner talking about the porn industry. He talks about making porn films with substance. He wants to make films that will grip the audience and keep them engaged until the end. He talks about how he's done comedies in his past. He says, "… my dream is to make a film that's true and right and dramatic."

As he talks about his dream, his fellow cast members Wahlberg, Julianne Moore, and Heather Graham all stare at him, hanging on and absorbing every word. They understand what the audience understands… at this moment, Burt Reynolds is speaking through his character. In the end, both the character and the actor achieved their dream, and I will always love how real this moment felt.

On PAGE TWO, Guest Contributor David Wilson weighs in on "Hooper," and a story about Producer Robert L. Levy of "Smokey and the Bandit."

HOOPER (1978) by David Wilson

David Wilson is a screenwriter and novelist from New York State. Click here [23] for his interview with Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com.



Hooper
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

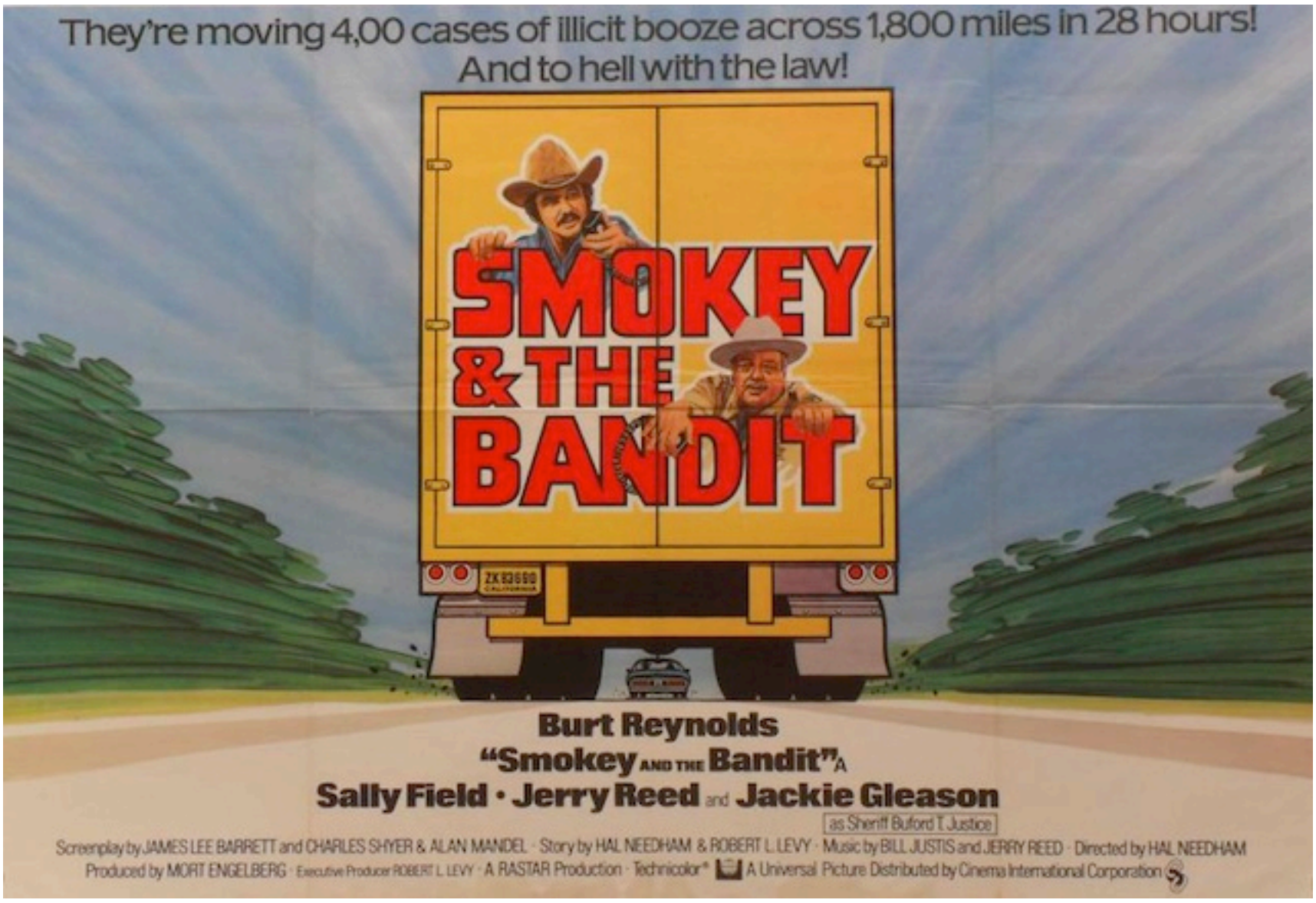
Riding high on the success of "Smokey and the Bandit," Burt Reynolds re-teamed with director Hal Needham to create this fun, action-packed and heartfelt tribute to Hollywood stuntmen. The story is a time-honored classic… the reigning champion, (Reynolds) tries to keep up with his younger rival (Jan-Michael Vincent) even if it costs him his life. And it's a Burt movie through and through, with crazy stunts (duh), fast cars, barroom brawls and Burt's self-aware charm. But the story also reveals the insecurities behind the bravado, as Hooper slowly comes to the realization that he can't be on top forever. Reynolds always surrounded himself with great performers and this film was no exception – along with Vincent, it co-starred Sally Fields, Brian Keith, Robert Klein and, my personal favorite, Adam West. "Hooper" is both a tribute to stuntmen and a (somewhat glib) statement on the frailty of success.

ALL PURE BURTNESS: Hooper entertains guests at a party with a film reel of his favorite stunts. He watches himself with glee, unaware that

all of his guests have all fallen fast asleep.

Robert L. Levy and SMOKEY AND THE BANDIT (1977) by Patrick McDonald

Robert L. Levy is a veteran film producer, and besides Smokey has produced a long string of successful films including “A Kid in King Arthur’s Court,” “She’s All That,” “Point Break,” “National Lampoon’s Van Wilder,” “Serendipity,” “Pay It Forward, “Wedding Crashers” and the early 2000s Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen teen movies.



Smokey and the Bandit

Photo credit: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment

I met Robert L. Levy in 2016 when we participated as jurors at DePaul University during their showcase night for student films. The funny and articulate film producer was a perfect choice for evaluating the night’s films, but it also was revealed that he had a long and successful career in Hollywood, including producing and creating the template for Burt Reynolds’ most famous role, as The Bandit in “Smokey and the Bandit.” Levy’s father, Jules, was a producer of TV westerns in the 1960s (“The Rifleman”) and produced the Burt Reynolds films “Sam Whiskey” (1969), “White Lightning” (1973) and “Gator” (1976), which transitioned Burt’s image.

After learning the producing ropes on “Gator,” Robert L. Levy took the full reins on “Smokey and the Bandit” and created the concept and the characters. The film, directed by former stunt coordinator Hal Needham (his debut), cast Burt Reynolds as The Bandit – a Trans Am driving rogue making a special delivery – with Sally Field riding shotgun. Producer Robert Levy delivered the ultimate image role for Burt Reynolds, and helped to strategize the distribution of the film, which was the second highest grossing film of 1977 (behind a little film called “Star Wars.”).

ALL PURE BURTNESS: The pictures published here are from the personal collection of Robert L. Levy. As for Levy’s experience with Burt Reynolds he had one word… “Sumbitch!” but followed with “Burt was a very funny guy, and the last of the great movie stars.”

Source material for this article is from IMDB.com. Burt Reynolds, The Last Movie Star, 1936-2018. All films available on DVD/Blu-ray and digital download.


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