

Director Ron Howard Delivers a Meticulous ‘Rush’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 27, 2013 - 2:50pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Defining the glory days of any sport is often centered on personal rivalries. The 1970s – notable for stand-offs like John McEnroe and Björn Borg – had a similarly contentious rivalry between Formula One car racers James Hunt and Niki Lauda, portrayed in Ron Howard’s “Rush.”

It was an amazing era for the sport, as it moved up from European interest to worldwide phenomenon. Hunt and Lauda faced off in the 1976 season, one year after Lauda had won the Formula One championship. Both men were “driven” by their own demons, which screenwriter Peter Morgan and director Ron Howard nicely exploit. There is a sense of the old country grit in the British Hunt and Austrian Lauda, as they fight beyond the racetrack, to something more glorious and expressive in their psyche. It is a film about pushing the limits of sanity in a strange motor vehicle, but it is also about what consequences that push can leave behind. The film does repeat itself a bit as the actual races wear on, but Howard proves again that he’s not a one-trick director in any sense.

The Formula Three circuit – a league below Formula One – generates a couple of competitors who trade off the one and two positions, The Brit James Hunt (Chris Hemsworth) and Niki Lauda (Daniel Brühl) from Austria. Both are from wealthy families, and both feel a need for speed. Lauda manages to use family connections and bank loans to buy a Formula One team, Hunt moves up his own team to essentially follow his rival. Kiki Lauda finishes as champion in 1975.



Team of Rivals: James Hunt (Chris Hemsworth) and Niki Lauda (Daniel Brühl) in ‘Rush’
Photo credit: Universal Pictures

This troubles the ambitious Hunt, but he does find time to canoodle with and marry the model Suzy Miller (Olivia Wilde). But the strain of competition causes the marriage to dissolve, as Hunt both loses his own car and then joins the Ferrari team. His opponent Lauda wants to repeat as champion, and also marries a socialite (Alexandra Maria Lara) along the way, but his laser-like focus on racing is in contrast to the more free-wheeling Hunt. The 1976 season has the two men trading first/second positions once again, but this time Lauda is severely burned in one race, and Hunt is constantly chasing the Austrian’s tail.

The detail in the film is magnificent, a testament to the veteran director Ron Howard and his ability to create a story in a time and place – of course Richie Cunningham should know something about the 1970s. The characters and their racing abilities are well represented, and each of the real events are meticulously recreated. Most impressive was the atmosphere, which was stoked with the era and anticipation of the racers’ rivalry.

The two lead actors are perfect in their personification of these real life racing legends – for once showing the real-life guys in clips near the end looked almost exactly like the actors. Daniel Brühl as Niki Lauda had the more difficult assignment, making an essentially unlikable competitor more complex. His Lauda is subtle, surprising at times, and even with a tragic injury never gets too far from his established persona. Chris Hemsworth (A.K.A. superhero Thor) is the perfect blonde god to step into Hunt’s shoes, and although his character is one note on the surface, he handles the bitterness of divorce and betrayal delicately.

The story, with its focus on the rivalry and nature of race car driving, is more human than expected. The use of the two wives as a counterpoint to the men’s obsessions was a nice touch, padding for their symbolic rubber rooms. The pacing was deliberate as well, allowing for quality time with the personalities of the two drivers, which gave more understanding to both their journeys and the reasons for strapping themselves to a 175 MPH time bomb.



Model Lovers: James Hunt and Suzy Miller (Olivia Wilde) in ‘Rush’
Photo credit: Universal Pictures

The sport of race car driving, while exceedingly visual and action-packed, is still a just a go around the track, or in the case of Formula One some famous street racing. It does get a bit redundant towards the end. The rivalry has been exposed, the race footage has been played out and the obstacles to overcome are all too apparent. There is less to hang a racing helmet on as it comes to a true and inevitable conclusion.

This is, however, a involving two hour glimpse into a sport, a time and two men that defined it. It is also a lesson in how short that opportunity can be, especially in a dangerous profession known as life.

“Rush” opens everywhere on September 27th. Featuring Chris Hemsworth, Daniel Brühl, Olivia Wilde, Alexandra Maria Lara and Christian McKay. Screenplay by Peter Morgan. Directed by Ron Howard. Rated “R”



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