

BC-CPT-DVDREVIEWS:KRT _ entertainment (1920 words)

Reviews of recent and upcoming DVD releases

By Billy O'Keefe

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(KRT)**

"The 40-Year-Old Virgin: Unrated" (NR, Universal, Dec. 13)

You know how lowbrow comedies tend to start out really funny and eventually either run out of steam or take a right turn into "serious plot device" territory? "The 40-Year-Old Virgin" doesn't do that. In fact, it actually gets funnier as things roll along. Credit the cast: Steve Carell certainly earns his spot on the cover as the aforementioned virgin, but he has serious competition from his co-workers (Romany Malco, Seth Rogen, Paul Rudd, Jane Lynch) in both the laughs and sexual frustration departments. Not to be seen by the easily offended, not to be missed by everyone else. The unrated edition features 17 extra minutes of satisfaction and a few exclusive extras not found on the R-rated disc.

Extras: Cast and crew commentaries, deleted scenes, outtakes, alternate takes, Rogen having dinner with a porn star.

MORE FUNNY FOR YOUR MONEY

_ "Puddle Cruiser" (R, Key DVD/Fox, Dec. 13): The debut film from the Broken Lizard comedy troupe, featuring the life and times of college freshman Felix Bean (Steve Lemme), finally comes to DVD. The DVD case art seems to scream "I'm raunchy and offensive!" upon first glance, but in actuality "Puddle Cruiser" better resembles an early Kevin Smith film than "Animal House." It is, for lack of a better description, uncultured (and genuinely funny) cinema for the thinking man. Extras: "Rodeo Clowns" documentary, commentary from the troupe.

_ "Aqua Teen Hunger Force: Four" (NR, Adult Swim): Who's ready for another helping of one of the most ridiculously funny cartoons on TV? Meatwad, Frylock and Master Shake _ who are indeed a wad of meat, an order of fries and a shake _ do battle against a force of evil that is, fortunately, slightly more incompetent and self-defeating than they are. It's all very stupid, but if you don't laugh, you probably don't have a soul. Includes 13 episodes (with commentary), plus a bonus unaired episode, fan art, Comic Con footage, making-of features, a funny "play all" bit and more.

_ "Airplane!: 'Don't Call Me Shirley' Edition" (PG, Paramount, Dec. 13): The funniest Leslie Nielsen film of all time, which may or may not be saying something to you. New extras include crew commentary, deleted scenes, interviews, trivia track and more.

_ "Jackass: The Box Set" (NR, MTV): The pinnacle of lowbrow, now in a box set that looks as classy as the show wasn't. You can pretend this is beneath you, but if you love slapstick, why resist? Includes the two previously released DVD volumes, plus the "long-lost" first volume (also available separately), five hours of bonus footage, cast/crew commentary, cast updates, the Gumball Rally 3000, VMA appearances, bonus booklet and more.

_ "The Best & Worst of American Idol: Seasons 1-4" (NR, Capital Entertainment): Yes, you get the good performances, which aren't as funny as they are actually good. But taking the good with the bad has never been as pleasurable as it is with this three-disc set, which delivers extended cuts of both the talented (Clay, Ruben, Kelly, Bo, Fantasia) and the "Whoa, what was that?" (William Hung and

several other unfortunate characters). Hosted in part by Paula Abdul and featuring performer interviews, unaired footage, bonus performances and a sit-down with Abdul herself.

_ "The Producers: Deluxe Edition" (NR, MGM, Dec. 13): The Mel Brooks movie that spawned the smash Mel Brooks musical that spawned the upcoming Mel Brooks movie musical (Synergy, folks!) gets the gold treatment it deserves. If you hate all that singing and dancing, this is the version to see. Extras: Making-of documentary, outtakes, photo/art galleries, preview of new film.

_ "Newlyweds: The Final Season" (NR, MTV): Sigh. Talk about timing, though. Includes 10 episodes, plus a behind-the-scenes feature, outtakes and a best-of retrospective (double sigh).

"Frank Miller's Sin City: Recut, Extended, Unrated" (R/UR, Dimension, Dec. 13)

Remember how DVD critics everywhere told you to pass on the original DVD release of "Sin City," even though the film is one of most stylish pieces of art ever printed to film? Well, this is why. Not only does this deluxe DVD set include the requisite extras the original release lacked, but it also boasts a remixed cut that's longer (by 23 minutes) and less staggered than the original theatrical release. Lest you prefer the original version, fear not: It's included as well. Enjoy the feast.

Extras: The "Sin City" graphic novel that inspired the film, two commentary tracks, audience track (pretend you're in the theater!), outtakes/alternate takes, "green screen" version of the film, a horde of behind-the-scenes features, interactive game, cooking class and more.

"24: Season Four" (NR, Fox)

How do you top two presidential assassination attempts, an exploding nuclear bomb and a biological weapons disaster? If you're "24," you do away with most of the cast, fire Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) from CTU (he's still around, don't worry) and throw everything and the evil kitchen sink at his hapless stand-ins. Bounds of credibility are stretched to the breaking point in "24," and that's never more the case than in season four, which lobs one disaster after another at you in the span of 24 real-time hours. Logic fetishists will lose their minds and scream at the TV, but those who can cope will be rewarded with arguably the most exciting piece of television ever conceived. It does not get any better than this. Includes 24 episodes (12 with commentary), plus a 10-minute Season 5 prequel, deleted scenes (with commentary), four behind-the-scenes features, cell phone episodes, music video and DVD-ROM content.

"Cinderella Man: Collector's Edition" (PG-13, Universal)

The worst thing about "Cinderella Man" was its studio, which dropped the film into the summer blockbuster rush and left it for dead with a lukewarm, gutless marketing campaign. Universal is making amends with this DVD release, and with good reason. The true story of Depression-era boxer Jim Braddock (Russell Crowe) and his family (headed by matriarch Renee Zellweger) is a fairy tale come true, and "Cinderella Man" can't avoid some of the trappings of your typical nobody-becomes-somebody film. It doesn't need to, thanks to a terrific cast _ Paul Giamatti and Craig Bierko are scene-stealers as manager Joe Gould and heavyweight champ Max Baer, respectively _ and director Ron Howard's Midas touch. Not blockbuster-ish enough for you? Wait until you see the fight scenes. Without betraying the period, they're far more stylish than you'd ever expect them to be.

Extras: Howard commentary, two writer commentaries, Braddock fight footage, deleted scenes,

Great Depression/boxing/behind-the-scenes features, photo gallery, pack of photo cards, commemorative booklet.

Also available: "Cinderella Man: The James J. Braddock Story" (NR, ESPN/Hart Sharp): In case you refuse to believe Jim Braddock was real, this 46-minute documentary serves as proof. Most intriguing to fans of the film is the bonus inclusion of four of Braddock's biggest fights, including the climactic showdown with Baer.

"The Kumars at No. 42" (NR, BBC Video)

Ambitious Sanjeev (Sanjeev Bhaskar) still lives with his parents but dreams of a big-time career as a talk show host. Fortunately, his folks (Indira Joshi and Vincent Ebrahim) love him, so they had a full-service set built in their backyard. Somewhat unfortunately, they have, along with Granny Sushila (Meera Syal), appointed themselves as Andy Richters to Sanjeev's Conan O'Brien. "The Kumars at No. 42" is part sitcom, part real talk show with real guests. The guests aren't necessarily in on the joke, either, which makes their deer-in-headlights interplay with the family a truly unique source of laughs. Think of a time your family embarrassed you in front of someone you brought home, but throw in a studio audience and television cameras, and you get the idea. American audiences won't recognize most of the guests, which dampens the fun somewhat, but the show's clever premise more than makes up for its cultural shortcomings. Includes six episodes (with commentary), plus a studio tour and bonus footage.

"Family Bonds: The Complete First Season" (NR, HBO, Dec. 13)

Take the dad from "American Chopper," replace his crazy family with a restructured but comparably cracked bunch of relatives, and trade him a badge for his toolbox. You're left with Tom Evangelista, one of the many "stars" of this enjoyable HBO reality show, which follows a family-run bail bonds business on and off the job. Other similarities to "Chopper": No hackneyed "confession room," lots of lost tempers, and the kind of mood swings that come with the realization that when you go home, your co-workers are coming with you. Includes 10 episodes, plus a family BBQ, profiles and a photo album.

"Footballers Wives: The Complete Second Season" (NR, Capital Entertainment)

Having a professional soccer player for a husband is a nice gig, since it frees you to enjoy such activities as shopping, personal grooming, violence, unwanted pregnancies, lesbian affairs, letting your child get kidnapped and accusing your husband's boss of sexual assault. And that's generally where we are as season two of the UK import "Footballers Wives" begins. Lest you confuse this with a certain other popular show about wives on the edge, know this: "FW" is even soapier and more over the top than anything happening on Wisteria Lane. The suffocating seriousness is almost entirely devoid of humor and irreverence, but the masochistic ridiculousness of it all is what will keep you watching. The footballers are featured heavily as well, but if you're looking for some good soccer action, it's not here. Includes eight episodes, plus slang dictionary and photo gallery.

"Four Minutes" (TV-PG, ESPN, Dec. 13)

ESPN's early forays into original films have yielded some seriously banal by-the-numbers efforts.

"Four Minutes," which tells the story of Roger Bannister's (Jamie MacLachlan) bid to break the four-minute-mile barrier, is a surprising step in the right direction. Credit in part goes to the man behind the movie: Bannister himself led a fascinating dual existence as both a pioneering track star and a medical whiz kid, and "Minutes," despite not really taking any daring liberties with the material, does a fine job lending dramatic weight to two fairly solo endeavors. Track and field isn't exactly thrilling fodder for a movie, especially when it's a race against a stopwatch, but "Minutes" makes it work.

Extras: Actual film of Bannister's historic run, trivia track, deleted scenes, outtakes, behind-the-scenes feature, interviews with Bannister and friend Chris Chataway (played by Grahame Wood in the film).

"Bad News Bears" (PG-13, Paramount, Dec. 13)

With all due respect to the new Morris Buttermaker (Billy Bob Thornton), the new "Bad News Bears" is a prime example of a film that didn't need updating. The charm of the original "Bears" _ whose formula has been aped by approximately 3,000 Disney sports movies _ was how gritty and genuinely imperfect everyone was. What was rough around the edges in 1976 is standard film fare today, and we're left with something that feels stale and contrived in its attempt to tap into the same magic. And hey, if you're going to redo a film, is too much to ask that you get the trophy scene at the end right? It's as if they ran out of film after the first take and were too lazy to buy more. Same goes for the underhand pitch scene: Professional wrestlers take more convincing dives than the kid on the mound.

Extras: Crew commentary, behind-the-scenes features, deleted scenes, outtakes, video baseball cards.

(Billy O'Keefe writes video game and DVD reviews for Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service.)

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