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Movie Preview

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Super Troopers fails at must-see status

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Some films attain immortality for their sublime excellence. Others earn notoriety for their atrociousness. "Super Troopers" deserves recognition for achieving a very difficult standard: perfect mediocrity.

"Super Troopers," like other films in the schlock-comedy genre — most notably, the "Police Academy" series, upon which this movie seems to draw heavily — makes a lovely diversion for anyone with \$7, a few thousand brain cells and about 30 minutes to waste. It depicts the antics of a small highway patrol outpost in rural Vermont, facing the ax in the latest round of state budget cuts. The entire film revolves around the rivalry between the highway patrol and the local municipal police, and the patrol's efforts to justify their continuing presence in the area.

The film begins with the merry band of troopers as they goof off on

the job, yanking the chain of local citizens and their city police adversaries. When the highway patrol captain learns of the possibility of his station's demise, he tries to whip his incompetent force into shape. They, of course, seem immune to his stern discipline; the situation looks grim for the noble protectors of Vermont's highways.

Things take a turn for the fortuitous, however, when the highway patrol accidentally busts a major marijuana shipment. Although the misguided group of misfits claims credit, it becomes apparent that there's more to the story than a single shipment. The final half of the film details their attempts to embarrass the municipal police and surprise the governor — a cameo appearance by former Wonder Woman Lynda Carter — with a second major bust in order to keep their outpost in the state budget.

The predictable conclusion, of course, is that the evil-doers in the city police are themselves part of a

massive drug conspiracy to funnel Canadian marijuana through rural Vermont. Although the ending has a few comic turns, anyone familiar with this type of film will not be too horribly shocked at the "surprise" conclusion.

"Super Troopers" is the brain-child of "Broken Lizard," a comic group led by Jay Chandrasekhar, who wrote and directed the film. The group's other film credit is "Puddle Cruiser," a well-reviewed if relatively obscure 1996 film. Chandrasekhar is also a director for the Fox series "Undeclared."

True to the genre, the main components of the film — editing, costumes, score, sound — are neither astounding nor astoundingly awful. Even though the cast contains no high-profile names, except for a brief appearance by Carter, the acting is competent, if uninspiring. From a technical perspective, "Super Troopers" is utterly pedestrian, except for a brief scene where split-screen and multiple cuts are employed to

emphasize, with a comical effect, the passage of time.

The real draw for this type of film, however, is not plot or acting but humor. This is the one area that makes the effort watchable.

Although slapstick abounds, the humor manages for the most part to avoid excessive anatomical or gross sexual themes. Most of the humor derives from the situations and a few well-timed one-liners; people with a modicum of intelligence will find several opportunities to laugh out loud. In the world of pure comedy, "Super Troopers" is the respectable person's alternative to the mean-spirited gastrointestinal "humor" of Adam Sandler or the mindless inanities of David Spade.

The film begins with a trio of potheads driving on the highway. Twice they narrowly escape detection by law enforcement, with one passenger ingesting \$130 worth of marijuana and mushrooms to hide the evidence, before they're finally apprehended. Throughout the dazed

motorists' harrowing ordeal — presented, in part, from the perspective of the rapidly deteriorating passenger — the highway patrol pulls their chain, ultimately stuffing them in the back of their cruiser as they race off after yet another speeder. The twisting and turning of the cruiser from the viewpoint of the motorist who "hid the evidence" is almost worth the admission price.

One of the better scenes involves a bet among the troopers that the officer questioning a speeder can't say "new" 10 times without arousing the suspicion of the motorist. The trooper wins his bet by faking an accent, and even gets to verbally abuse the driver who laughs at the accent. Sound comedy? Sure, but it works, and even the moviegoers don't catch on until later in the film.

Perhaps the most outrageous scene features Kevin Heffernan as officer Farva. After agauling a fast-food employee for sabotaging his lunch, Farva is deloused at the city

jail. For a few seconds, Heffernan joins the small but growing ranks of actors with on-screen full frontal male nudity. Unfortunately, however, the obese actor is covered in wet powdered sugar and is hung like a kitten.

Even though the plot conclusion detracts from the basic comical premise of the film — bored cops pulling pranks on each other and on unsuspecting civilians, an idea that seems reasonable enough — the balance of story and pure humor mix sufficiently well that the overall effort doesn't collapse under its own weight.

In the final analysis, "Super Troopers" is a mediocre film that is certainly watchable but shouldn't top anyone's must-see list. The acting is competent and the humor is actually mildly amusing, but it's rather unlikely that anyone involved in this production will be called forward to accept any film awards anytime soon. Conclusion: wait for the rental.