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Speed Racer - Blu-ray

Is this just style over substance?

by Stuart Miles published on 14 November 2008

The Wachowski Brothers re-invented the action movie with *The Matrix*, so can they bring that vision to the family movie? We buckle up to find out.

Based on the Japanese anime *Mach Go Go Go*, this re-working leaves pencils and cartoons behind in favour of green screen and CGI. So much CGI that you'll question if the cast actually stepped out of the studio at any point in the 2 hour 15 minute feature.

While I never personally watched episode after episode of the original, I do remember catching the odd show and the overall premise is the same here. Emile Hirsch, the kid from "The Girl Next Door", is Speed Racer, a racer in the fastest racing show on earth torn between the lure of big business and good old family values.

With a plot line that is incredibly thin on the ground, big corporations trying to take away the fun of the sport, it's left to the acting and those special effects to make this into a movie worth watching. Disappointingly the acting, despite a star studded cast including Susan Sarandon, Christina Ricci as the love interest, Matthew Fox as the mentor and John Goodman as Pop Racer, is like the storyline fairly flat.

But, before you ditch this altogether, *Speed Racer* is strangely fairly fun to watch (well Sunday afternoon fun). Why? Those CGI graphics.

Coming in every bright colour other than beige it is a kaleidoscope of effects. Think *Dick Tracy* - remember the one with Madonna and Warren Beatty - and then bring that into the 21st century done right.

The Wachowski Brothers, who's *Matrix* wasn't exactly an acting masterpiece, have managed to put together such a spectacular fast pace mish



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-mash of colours ideas, cuts and edits that it makes the MTV music video generation decidedly old and staid. See that in 1080p thanks to the Blu-ray version and the colours, if your TV is good enough, will spring out, fly across the living room and slap you around the face. The race sequences, which dominate the movie, are an impressive disco of colours.

Beyond the film there are a handful of featurettes including the rather annoying child actor Paulie Litt showing you around the set taking to different people and learning what's what.

Best of the bunch is Speed Racer: Car Fu a 27-minute documentary about the cars and the design process. It's not independent enough to be a fully fledged documentary, but its one of those things you'll find yourself watching because you can't be bothered to go to bed and there isn't anything else on (but only the once).

Disappointingly the UK Blu-ray edition doesn't include the game or the digital edition as featured in the US version.

VERDICT

Supposedly upset that their young nephews couldn't watch any of their films, the Wachowski Brothers have set out to make a family movie and in that respect achieved it. Your little ones will be happy to watch this over and over again.

So is this just style over substance? Of course, but the graphics are that impressive and innovative - it's an anime style without being anime - that for some reason we didn't mind the poor script, hammy acting and obvious plotline.

Good for Blu-ray, but really only for the kids.

Rating: PG

Staring: Emile Hirsch, Christina Ricci, Matthew Fox, Susan Sarandon, Joon Park, John Goodman, Scott Porter & Christian Oliver

At a glance

What is it?

Japanese anime Wachowski Brothers style

Good

Those CGI graphics

Bad

Obvious plotline, flat acting

Verdict

Good for Blu-ray, but really only for the kids

Price £15.99

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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Directed by: Andy Wachowski & Larry Wachowski
Features: Speed Racer: Ramping Up!, Meet The Drivers Of The WRL, Explore The Film's Incredible Cars And Unbelievable Racetracks, Behind The Scenes.

This Blu-ray was kindly loaned to us by Play.com, the UK's favourite online entertainment retailer.