

## Cadillac Man ★★★

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**Year of Release:** 1990

Review by Randy Parker

**Country:** USA

**Verdict:** See It

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*Cadillac Man* is not the first movie to revolve around a hostage situation, and it certainly won't be the last. Screenwriter Ken Friedman, however, has constructed a hostage crisis which transcends the usual Hollywood formulas and clichés. *Cadillac Man* puts a new spin on an old wheel by being the first hostage movie I can think of to feature a confused terrorist who doesn't know what he wants—a terrorist whose only demand is that the police “go away.” The movie also adds the new twist of having its hero, Robin Williams, try to talk his way out of the crisis rather than shoot his way out.

*Cadillac Man* has an overly long set-up, but once the movie kicks into gear, it gets a lot of mileage out of an intriguing premise. Williams plays a car salesman whose personal life is in shambles. He has serious female trouble with not only his girlfriend (Lori Petty) but also his ex-wife (Pamela Reed) and his money-draining mistress, splendidly played by Fran Drescher. At first, the movie seems kind of forced, especially Williams' voice-over narration, which is meant to establish his character. But just when you start to get impatient and begin wondering what the point is, Tim Robbins literally comes crashing into the movie, and the story quickly comes into focus.

How does Robbins fit into the picture? His wife (Annabella Sciorra) and Williams work at the same auto show-room. Robbins is crazed with the idea that she is having an affair with any or all of the salesmen so he gets an AK-47, drives his motorcycle through the show-room window and takes the entire dealership hostage, including Williams and all of the customers.

Williams gives a fascinating performance as the fast talking salesman who must use all of his wheeling and dealing skills to gain Robbins' trust and talk him into releasing the hostages. A true team player, Williams never tries to steal the spotlight from the other actors, all of whom give zesty performances. Robbins, in particular, is dazzling as the manic terrorist who isn't playing with a full deck. Williams and Robbins reportedly improvised many of their scenes, and it's exhilarating to see them flying by the seats of their pants as they play off one another.

*Cadillac Man* is impossible to pigeon-hole: it's not exactly a drama and not exactly a comedy. The movie lies in that gray area somewhere in between, gracefully mixing humor and drama. Director Roger Donaldson extracts comic relief from a Chinese restaurant close to the hostage site, where a rude waitress, deliciously played by Lauren Tom, abuses customers by telling them what to order and how much to order.

Unfortunately, *Cadillac Man* sometimes stalls and breaks down; it could use a major tune up in the editing room. The movie takes much too long to get to the hostage crisis, and, even worse, Petty's role as Williams' fashion conscious girlfriend is virtually irrelevant to the story line. Her scenes are unforgivably awkward and unnecessary; they should have been left on the cutting room floor.

“The Salesman, The Terrorist, His Wife, and Her Lover” earns extra brownie points, however, for not being a sequel and for not being a buddy, police, ghost, or mind-switching movie. Originality is a rare commodity in Hollywood; thankfully, *Cadillac Man* has a full tank.

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