

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: Skip It

Tom Hanks has seemed determined lately to flush his career down the toilet. In his previous movie, *The 'burbs*, he played the only normal guy on his block. The character was a dead bore and a waste of Hanks' comic talent. In *Turner & Hooch*, Hanks is stuck in another mundane role, playing straight man to a slobbering, butt-ugly canine. Yes, that's right, Hanks' co-star is a dog and so is the movie.

Hanks plays an obsessively fastidious detective whose highly-organized life is turned upside down when he teams up with a dog to solve a murder. The dog, Hooch, is a homely mutt with an attitude problem: he's mean, he's grumpy, and he slobbers like Niagara falls. The movie is supposed to show how Hooch teaches the uptight detective how to be more easy going. Heck, the dog even helps Turner get laid.

Turner & Hooch is too light-hearted to be an effective crime thriller. It's not funny enough to be a good comedy. And it's too contrived to stir up any serious drama or character development. In order to get easy laughs, the script caters to the lowest common denominator, which in this case is saliva. Nearly every scene includes a drool gag, and in my book, resorting to slobber for laughs is about as low as a comedy can sink; we're talking a level of sophistication on par with vomit and snot jokes. But *Turner & Hooch* doesn't have the decency to stop at drooling; showing no mercy, it even inflicts the dreaded fart joke on us. The movie never real-

ly decides what road it wants to take: in one scene it gives us the flatulence gag, in the next a suspenseful shootout, and at the end a shameless, tear-jerking finale.

Hanks is at his best when he plays off-beat characters, like the 12-year-old in *Big* and the narcissistic comedian in *Punchline*. Movies like *The 'burbs* and *Turner & Hooch* should be burned for failing to tap Hanks' immense comic potential, let alone his capacity for drama. Unfortunately, in *Turner & Hooch* we get to see only fleeting moments of the actor's comic genius.

On the other hand, as Hooch, Beasley delivers a riveting, Oscar-caliber performance; I'd definitely nominate him for best dog in a major motion picture. As one audience member exclaimed: "That dog's so ugly it's cute!" I must admit Beasley does possess an incredibly expressive face, and he's perhaps the finest actor in the movie.

Actually, in all seriousness, that honor probably goes to Mare Winningham as the veterinarian who becomes Hanks' love-interest. What little screen time she has is precious; she turns in a credible performance in a forgettable film.

Turner & Hooch might have created more sparks if it had been from the dog's point of view or, better yet, if Turner and Hooch had switched minds halfway through the movie. Now that might have been funny: Tom Hanks mimicking a canine. The mind-switching doggie movie—it's never been done before!