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MOVIE NEWS

SPEED LOVERS & THUNDER IN DIXIE - A Hot Rod Double Feature for Drag Race Fans on DVD



Something Weird Video scores big with two Southern hotrod flicks packaged with lots of great shorts.

Speed Lovers (1968), featuring a Billy Lee Riley title song that's worth the price of admission, is a low-budget slice of racing heaven, "Filmed in "Speedcolor!" Callow

youth Scott Clayton wants out on the track, even though he's never raced before. You gotta give it to the kid for nerve. Neither his father, "Flip", head mechanic to Fred Lorenzen, nor real-life racer Lorenzen, playing himself, want to give this kid a break, and you can't blame them. Played by the film's director, William F. McGaha (who also produces and co-writes), Scott is an obnoxious guy. It's okay that McGaha can't really act, though, because Scott is such a dork, a better actor might have given him unnecessary depth. "I can do anything. In or out of a race car!" he proclaims to anyone who will listen. He also has the oddest part in his hair ever captured on film.

Then there's Vanessa Hamilton (Peggy O'Hara), competing team owner and vamp. "Tonight you dream about me making you a great race driver. Sweet dreams, Scott". And he does, in a wacky little sequence! But it'll just be a dream unless he can get his father and Lorenzen in Vanessa's stable. She drives a hard bargain, but Scott's sure he can do it, even though Dad tells him "you'll have a cold engine in hell before that happens... You don't work for Vanessa; she owns you, lock stock and four barrels!" Ah, but then things really get interesting. There's Pinky Bentley, Vanessa's mob hook up, who wants in on the action. He's kind of a Bond baddie, complete with considerable girth and sunglasses, who hosts an "international collection of playthings" and lures Scott into his web, hoping to snare Flip and Fred for Vanessa's team. Lots of gratuitous pool lounging and some really bad dancing -- McGaha again -- ensues. Still, there's something almost likeable about Scott, who doesn't care where the chicks or the chance to drive come from -- he'll take what comes his way and probably muck it up.

Speed Lovers offers some great scenes in Atlanta's long-gone Brave Falcon club, featuring a couple of rare live-on-film performances (including title song) by Billy Lee Riley and crew. And there's plenty of great vintage racing footage from Atlanta Motor Speedway.

In the end, Scott may be a "punk kid", but he can rise to the occasion. Without giving away the warm-fuzzy finale to this little picture, let's just say that the only thing that gets burned is a whole lotta rubber. For beehives, sports jackets and a

NEW BOOKS

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Anna Lee: Memoir of a Career on General Hospital and in Film

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Welcome to TCM's Holiday Gift Guide

Searching for the Perfect Gift? We've got great ideas for Mom, for Dad, for the Film Buff and more. Everything from TCM watches to apparel to new classic film releases on DVD.



The Lady Vanishes on DVD - Available 11/20!

When an elderly woman disappears in the middle of a train ride and the young lady who shared her compartment cannot find anyone who remembers the missing person, a complex and dangerous search for the truth begins in this 1938 thriller by Alfred Hitchcock
Was: \$39.99
Now: \$33.99

great go-go vibe, **Speed Lovers** is a winner.

From the noir side of speedsplotation we've got **Thunder in Dixie** (1964). This one's in black and white and is a little hipper, a little slicker and a lot darker, with a jazzy soundtrack and some great opening credits. Stock car racer Ticker Welch (Mike Bradford) blames his (ex) best friend Mickey Arnold (Harry Millard) for killing his fiancé in a drunken car accident. Now they must meet in the "Dixie 400", and it's a grudge match! There's plenty of angst on and off the track, but the acting is pretty darn good at times. There's even a Shakespeare quote! We've got Lily Arnold (Judy Lewis) who assumes, foolishly, that her husband would quit racing after his three-month hospital stay for the crash that killed Ticker's girl. Then there's Nancy (Karen Hallet), who's got a chip on her shoulder for the sport that killed her man and a hankering in her pants for Ticker. And Mickey, who admits his "brain is the size of a pea," but is not a bad guy, really.

It's back to the (then) Atlanta International Raceway for plenty of great racing footage. Other locations include a joint called the Rustic Cabin, featured in several memorable scenes. Located in Colmar Manor, Maryland, it was part of a collection of roadhouses and bars that made up what was once known as the "notorious Bladensburg strip." You might notice Berk Motley's name on the stage podium as Barry Darvel (misspelled Darval in the credits) croons "Maybe Tomorrow". Motley was a character himself, having appeared in "Ripley's Believe It or Not" in 1942, for playing three clarinets at once while standing on his head. He bought the Rustic Cabin in the late '40s, eventually renaming it Berk Motley's Sirloin Room.

Philly songwriter Bix Reichner (who titled the song "Papa Loves Mambo") wrote the lyrics for most of **Thunder in Dixie's** soundtrack songs, including the closing credit tune "The Big Crash".

All in all, there's some cheating, some fighting, some stripping and some racing. What more could you want? **Thunder in Dixie** is a solid little movie and, paired with **Speed Lovers**, would make for the most amazing drive-in double-header ever.

Shorts include lots of great trailers, a vintage PSA and the racy "Hot Rod Girls" – an awkward little striptease necessitated by an overheated radiator. Don't miss these two rare mini-classics and the juicy extras on this hotrod extravaganza.

For more information about **Speed Lovers/Thunder in Dixie**, visit Image Entertainment. To order **Speed Lovers/Thunder in Dixie** (it is part of the Film Noir Classic Collection, Vol. 2), go to TCM Shopping.

by Emily Soares



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