

*Planes, Trains and Automobiles* has arrived on schedule for these deregulated times. This John Hughes comedy about a businessman with travel difficulties is being released today across the nation by Paramount Pictures.

They held a screening and press conference earlier this month in Hollywood to promote the movie and—quite fittingly—I missed my flight from Gainesville.

But life hadn't finished imitating art. As a phalanx of television cameras lined the press room, reporters from across the country sat with tape recorders in hand, waiting for Steve Martin, John Candy and Hughes to appear. They waited. And waited. And waited.

As they soon found out, Candy's flight had been delayed because of bad weather. Studio executives found their carefully orchestrated media event bamboozled by the very same problem Hughes had mined so well in his film.

After several hours of delay, the decidedly friendly questioning began. The affair took place in a sound stage on the Paramount Studios lot, and anyone who fears more time and creativity is spent promoting a movie than actually *making* it would not have had their fears allayed.

The stage had been converted into a mock airport terminal complete with uniformed flight attendants and bay windows overlooking a runway. The only thing "missing" was the luggage, and they probably arranged to have that sent to Oklahoma.

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It was all in keeping with the mood of *Planes*, a gentle comedy about a businessman (Martin) who wants only to get home for Thanksgiving but finds his travel plans interrupted by plane delays, engine failures, car problems and a boorishly friendly fellow traveler named Del Griffith (Candy), a man who breathes trouble the way others breathe oxygen.

For Martin, this is the final stage in his evolution into a leading man. On film, he exudes a subtle, reserved power quite unlike the comedic shtick with which he has made his mark. As with *Roxanne*, his critically acclaimed updating of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Martin shows a style and grace befitting a star.

This new-found confidence seems to have spilled over into his personal life, for Martin strode onstage with an easy smile, bringing with him jokes and the quiet air of someone in control.

He sat down, looking sharp in a navy blazer, and kidded the reporters casually. "What was I going to say?" he wonders aloud. "I had something funny to say to win them right over."

John Hughes "won them over" years ago with his first two movies, *Sixteen Candles* and *The Breakfast Club*, both of which were critical and commercial successes.

Though his first major triumphs were scripts for such "adult" movies as *National Lampoon's Vacation* and *Mr. Mom*, the label-hungry press has tagged him a "teen" director. Still, it's true that *Planes* is the first time Hughes has worked with a cast composed of adults, and he isn't above poking fun at how he is perceived.

When asked why he chose Martin and Candy, Hughes said, "They were forced on me by the studio. We were looking for Rob Lowe and Judd Nelson."

No one forced John Candy to be involved. He clearly looked thrilled just to be there. In films like *Summer Rental* and *Armed and Dangerous*, he appeared to be trapped in the "Jolly John Candy" character that first made him famous on *SCTV* and in *Splash*. It was difficult to tell whether he was incapable of more or just never given the opportunity.



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Still, not everything has changed. When a Japanese reporter began a question directed to Candy by saying, "The Japanese are a small people and we are great admirers of men of large size," he adopted a God-I'm-macho pose and said in a deep, burly voice, "Why thank you," and the entire room of reporters burst into laughter.

Paramount hopes the laughter will continue this Thanksgiving and Christmas. It's the most successful studio in Hollywood, blessed with major stars like Tom Cruise and a magic touch: Its current blockbuster is *Fatal Attraction*, a thriller about infidelity that came out of left field to dominate the box office for the last two months.

This is not something a studio with *Beverly Hills Cop II* and *The Untouchables* under its belt needed, but that's what happens when you're on a roll. Paramount would like to keep on rolling into the new year with two major releases.

The first is *Raw*, a concert film starring Eddie Murphy. Filmed during his expletive- and audience-filled comedy tour, *Raw* is certain to draw a huge adult audience.

*Planes* was seen as the wholesome, family-oriented round in their double-barrelled cinematic shotgun. And the finished product delivered by Hughes certainly fits the bill: It's a sweet, sentimental tale with nary a trace of nudity or violence.

Unfortunately, it came wrapped in an

“R” rating, courtesy of the Motion Picture Association of America. This undeserved ruling hinges on a crucial scene in which Martin’s character utters “the ‘f’ word.” “But only 19 times,” he says with mock indignation.

In the scene, Neal Page has finally cracked under the frustrating problems he’s borne so silently. The normally unflappable businessman begins lashing out like a loose cable, berating an innocent car rental agent in an attempt to get transportation.



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It is unquestionably one of the funniest moments in the movie, and it is also quite unoffensive. Hughes notes that he had “no intentions of being controversial.” Martin concurs, stressing that it was not gratuitous and very much “the culminations of this character’s frustrations.”

Paramount is probably frustrated at having their nice little movie slapped with an "R" rating and it's hard to imagine a better candidate for "PG-13" than *Planes*.

Still, this controversy probably will be seen as only a minor annoyance a few weeks from now. With the formidable marketing of the studio, the combined draw of Steve Martin and John Hughes and the film's very real audience appeal, *Planes* should enjoy a healthy success.

Appropriately, Hughes is now prepping the release of *She's Having A Baby*, a comedy about a young couple with a child on the way, which stars Kevin Bacon and Elizabeth McGovern. It's appropriate because the movie was originally scheduled to appear on screens in the spring of '87, but was delayed time and again amid the inevitable rumors of problems.

Hughes insists that they aren't true. He says he is "thrilled" that Paramount was willing to let him wait until next year, because the two-week lag between the end of filming on *Baby* and the starting of *Planes* didn't give him enough time to properly deal with the final editing and scoring. He has promised them a delivery date and they have tentatively set a release for early next year. But Paramount should know better than anyone not to expect *Baby* to arrive on time.