



Pontiac Moon

US : 1994 : dir. Peter Medak : Paramount : 100 min
prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[Ryan Todd](#)
Ted Danson; Mary Steenburgen; Eric Schweig; Cathy Moriarty; Max Gail; Lisa Jane Persky;
J. C. Quinn; John Schuck; Don Swayze

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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Eccentric pop (Danson) takes 11-year old son on dusty road trip to coincide with Apollo XI moon landing in July 1969. Think agoraphobic mom (Steenburgen) will finally have the guts to leave the house and follow them? 11-year olds may like this. Shot in Panavision. *1/2 "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide" or
"TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995"]

TV Times review:

"Ted Danson's movie career has always been a bit patchy and "PONTIAC MOON" didn't do enough to stabilise it. A pity, as it's an enjoyable road movie, if not up with the likes of "RAIN MAN". It's 1969 and Danson is a teacher with an emotionally-scarred wife (Mary Steenburgen) and an 11-year old son (Ryan Todd). With the first moon landing imminent, he takes the lad to the Spires of the Moon national park in his classic Pontiac. Their adventures on the road form the bulk of the film's narrative and Danson fills his part well. The ending is telegraphed pretty early on, which makes much of the story seem like padding, but it's a pleasant enough ride all the same. *** "

"11 year olds may like this" is what we call damning with faint praise. No event until the September 11th 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre gripped the entire planet like the Apollo XI moon shot in July 1969, and where the one was an atrocity of staggering proportions, the other was a moment of collective awe and pride at man's technical prowess. The frisson didn't last very long – not even as long as Apollo XII – but it was one of those rare moments when the focus of humankind turned on a single event, and national priorities seemed of very small consequence.

How is that defining moment commemorated in this film? By Danson and son racing their Pontiac across country to reach the "Spires of the Moon" – a cratered desert region designated a national park – before Armstrong could fluff his immortal one-liner ("That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind"). Hysterical mom Mary Steenburgen trails

after them in Danson's amphibious car, having been housebound for years following a road accident in which she lost their second child, and Danson was partially crippled.

But – did anyone actually **read** the script before committing this project to production? It isn't even interesting enough to be a stinker. It merely lies on the screen like a colourless, flavourless jelly before seeping away to the back of the mind leaving no trace behind. Nothing at all significant happens to Danson and son (Ryan Todd) en route from A to B, and the resolution of their personal problems hardly compensates since their characters are so poorly drawn. Of course, the boy receives some traditional indian wisdom along the way from a travelling companion – "Don't sweat the small stuff" and "Everything is small stuff" – which helps him overcome his own insecurities and see his dad in a new light, and of course mom conquers her fear of the outside world so that the family can forge ahead to a future filled with new promise.

It's all so trite and lacklustre. Danson misjudges his central performance as a petulant teacher in denial about the road accident which so traumatised his wife. He's not the engaging eccentric of "**CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG**" variety, and while his persona in the popular TV sitcom "**Cheers**" was certainly appealing, he displays no charisma at all in his big screen roles.

A road movie needs to be punctuated with nuggets of interesting encounters even when, as in "**RAIN MAN**", it is foremost an internal journey. "**PONTIAC MOON**" supplies none, the chief incident being a stopover at a bar where Danson does a spot of karaoke and is picked up by a floozie, much to his son's annoyance. When the car claps out later, they steal an engine from a wayside repair shop and are pursued by highway police in a climax which can't make up its mind whether its aiming for comedy or thrills. So think father-and-son "**THELMA AND LOUISE**", made for a Disney audience, and you have the flavour this film was aiming for. Think week-old bubble-gum and you have the flavour it achieved. It goes without saying that there is no interesting period detail whatsoever. Buzz Aldrin would be turning in his grave if he were dead, which he isn't. ***To be avoided.***

Ryan Todd played the younger son in the early scenes of "**BACKDRAFT**" (91) who sees his fireman father killed while tackling an apartment building blaze. Nothing else is known of him.

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