

The Reivers

(aka: "The Yellow Winton Flyer")

US : 1969 : dir. Mark Rydell : Cinema Center / Duo / Solar : 111 min

prod: Irving Ravetch : scr: Irving Ravetch & Harriet Frank Jr : dir.ph.: Richard Moore

[Mitch Vogel](#) [d]; [Lindy Davis](#)

Steve McQueen; Rupert Crosse; Will Geer; Sharon Farrell; Ruth White; Clifton James;
Michael Constantine; Juano Hernandez; Lonny Chapman; Diane Shalet; Pat Randall;
Diane Ladd; Ellen Geer; Dub Taylor; Allyn Ann McLerie; Charles Tyner; Shug Fisher;
Raymond Guth; Lou Frizzell; Billy Green Bush

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	☺	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Deep nostalgia for the deep South of 1905, but is **that** a 1905 vintage shirt? Or a 1969 vintage shirt? You the viewer at home must decide.

Source: The Moving Picture Boy



Reivers is an 18th-century word for thieves or cattle-rustlers. Messing with another man's automobile was a lynching matter in Mississippi.

Source: Amazon.com

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
1996 review:

"Picaresque film from the Faulkner novel about a young boy (Vogel) in 1905 Mississippi who takes off for an adventurous automobile trip with devil-may-care McQueen and buddy Crosse. Completely winning Americana, full of colourful episodes, equally colourful characters. Screenplay by Irving Ravetch (who also produced) and Harriet Frank Jr. Aka **"THE YELLOW WINTON FLIER"**. Shot in Panavision. ***1/2 "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above, though mistranslating "boy" as "young man", and "devil-may-care" as "careless"

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"In Mississippi at the turn of the century a hired hand borrows the new family auto for a trip into Memphis with the grandson of the family and a black stablehand¹. Pleasant but insubstantial yarn of more gracious days; most attractive to look at, it entertains gently without ever reaching a point. Dir.ph: Richard Moore. Academy Award nominations: John Williams; Rupert Crosse * "

50 Years of the Movies comment:

"...After **"BULLITT"** McQueen was among the biggest of the big; a so-so Western, **"THE REIVERS"** (70), couldn't dislodge him."

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"William Faulkner's last novel makes a recklessly diffuse and pleasant little film, set in Mississippi at the turn of the century. A boy (Mitch Vogel) takes a trip to Memphis with two of the family's hired hands, a black (Rupert Crosse) and Boon (Steve McQueen), who aims to visit his girl (Sharon Farrell) there, working in a brothel. Unfortunately, one leaves the film feeling its niceness and prettiness are ultimately pointless. * "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Not all of William Faulkner's novels have survived the transfer to film very well, but this charming tale about the adventures of a 12-year old boy with some of his older buddies is a notable exception. The journey follows a northward route up to Memphis, and McQueen, giving one of his most winning performances to date, is a big help. ***1/2 "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"This film no more gets to the heart of William Faulkner's novels than the other adaptations by Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank Jr, including **"THE SOUND AND THE FURY"**

¹ Both McQueen and Crosse were adopted by Vogel's family as children.

and "THE LONG HOT SUMMER". However, it is an amusing film about an 11-year old boy in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi at the turn of the century, who takes off in the family car with two hired hands, and experiences a series of colourful adventures on the road to Memphis. Appealing performances by McQueen, Rupert Crosse, Vogel (as the boy), Farrell, Will Geer, Lonny Chapman, Michael Constantine and Juano Hernandez. Narrated by Burgess Meredith. Music by John Williams. Academy Award nomination: Crosse, Best Supporting Actor *** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"Intermittently entertaining turn-of-the-century yarn, with Steve McQueen initiating young Mitch Vogel into the ways of the world² over the opposition of Will Geer. Mark Rydell directs without conviction. * "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Period charm accounts for much of the mild enjoyment to be had from this sunnily nostalgic adaptation of William Faulkner's novel about an unholy trio – small boy (Vogel), dimwitted young buck (McQueen) and wily black (Crosse) – who "borrow" a 1905 Winton Flyer and drive triumphantly off to Memphis for three days of illicit pleasure. The message about how his experiences help the boy to grow up is a little hard to take in this winsome reading of Faulkner, but the settings are first rate and so are the performances, though Rydell's direction tries just too hard, drenching itself in "style". "

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"A gentle, rambling tale of a young boy's adventures in the Deep South, which start when his grandfather's hired hand Boon (Steve McQueen) "borrows" his boss's new 1905 Winton car and takes the lad to Memphis. There they visit a bordello, lose the car and try to win a horserace. The episodic tale is taken from the book by William Faulkner (his last and probably most difficult to read) and given rhythm by Burgess Meredith's narration. It's

beautifully photographed, has a strong sense of period, and the rite-of-passage elements of the story avoid the usual mawkish pitfalls. McQueen is excellent as is young Mitch Vogel as the boy. Having said that, they have strong competition from Robert Crosse as McQueen's black workmate who tags along for the ride: he manages to steal many of the scenes he's in. A delightful film, full of the fun of being alive. **** "



Source: *indeterminate website*

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"THE REIVERS" is a nice bawdy film, sort of Walt Disney with an adult rating. Imagine a charming nostalgia-soaked family-type film about a winsome 11-year old in turn-of-the-century Mississippi who gets himself cut up in a Memphis bordello defending the good name of a lovely professional lady.

The film is an adaptation of William Faulkner's last novel. Mitch Vogel, as the kid, is appealing, subtle and sensitive, hovering between freckle-faced moppet *[sic]* and sexual puberty.

He is led astray by the family handy man and resident rogue Steve McQueen, who gives a lively ribald characterisation. Completing the triumvirate of "Reivers", an old word that means "thieves", is Rupert Crosse. He is a humorously light-hearted but sardonically mocking dude.

In a gleaming gold Winton Flyer, the three steal off to Memphis, and the end of innocence *[sic]* for the boy."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

² Steady!

“Grand adaptation of the William Faulkner tale concerning a young boy (Mitch Vogel) who, with the help of his mischievous older friends (Steve McQueen and Rupert Crosse), “borrows” an automobile and heads for fun and excitement in 1905 Mississippi. The charming vignettes include a stopover in a brothel and a climactic horse race that could spell doom for the adventurers. Rated “PG”. **** ”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Mitch Vogel:

“The good-natured, red-headed Mitchell Vogel hit the heights in feisty duo with Steve McQueen in **“THE REIVERS”**, a road movie set in tough, turn-of-the-century Mississippi and based (minus a dimension or two) on a William Faulkner novel. Vogel’s Lucius, glorying in the bright yellow Winston Flyer they travel in, and rising to the challenge of this first brothel with enthusiasm and gallantry, is a cheering creation. As a late teenager, Mitch was in **“BORN INNOCENT”** (74) on TV, but also in series like **“Bonanza”** (where he had a leading role), **“Petrocelli”** and **“The Little House on the Prairie”**.”

[no listing in “The Critics’ Film Guide” or “The Virgin Film Guide”]

Time Out review:

“A 12-year old boy (Mitch Vogel)³, a dumb hick chauffeur (McQueen) and his black stablehand buddy (Crosse) “borrow” the family’s brand new 1905 Winton Flier and head off for the bright lights of Memphis. This is a charming, sunny comedy, and it knows it – at times its like being force fed molasses. Faulkner might have his doubts. ”

Amazon.com review:

“An 11-year-old boy, Lucius McCaslin, is taken for the adventure of his life by Boon Hogganback, the family handyman in this Southern coming of age tale. Together with a black man named Crosse, the three set off for the big city where the boy learns

some valuable lessons about the world. An adventuresome tale of a young boy who leaves home and sets off on a journey with two devil-may-care older friends. This delightful piece of Americana is based on William Faulkner’s prize-winning novel. Academy Award Nominations: 2. Originally rated MPAA M. Colour by Technicolor.”

³ He’s 11, the script says so – repeatedly



Skinny-dipping racial harmony – the opening titles, Burgess Meredith's recital of Faulkner's prose and John Williams' rich languorous score set the tone of the film. This is not the Dixieland of hatred and brooding resentment, but the wistful summery land of childhood memories. Source: indeterminate website

Amazon.com sample customer reviews:

"William Faulkner was one of America's greatest authors. His Pulitzer Prize winning works are renowned for his ability to capture, with affection and fascination, the culture and people of Mississippi... Southerners of all colour, class, and gender. Many of Faulkner's stories evoke a sombre tone of Southern Gothic tragedy based on his observations of racial intolerance, and the decline of traditional Southern values before the forces of greed and modernisation. In contrast to his more serious works, **"THE REIVERS"** is light-hearted, comic, and thoroughly entertaining.

The movie captures, with rich authenticity, the colourful characters of Faulkner's Mississippi. The cinematography and music evoke the sites and sounds *[sic]* of a picturesque South in 1905. The cast,

including narration by Burgess Meredith, is impeccable. The movie centres on the joyriding adventures of 11-year old Lucius McCaslin, his cousin Boon Hogganback (Steve McQueen) and their black relation (Rupert Crosse). The story involves a stolen car, a 4-day odyssey from northern Mississippi to the "red light" district of Memphis, a horse race, and the life-changing experiences of young Lucius. Will Geer, as Lucius' grandfather "Boss," offers a memorable performance when he confronts the young boy with his misdeeds, proving again that the word is mightier than the hand. William Faulkner would be proud of this movie."

– Steve Rawlings, Denver, Colorado

"**"THE REIVERS"** is a purely entertaining film about a young boy who is introduced to an adult world at the turn of the century. Perfectly cast and well-written, this film is sure to delight all audiences. Steve McQueen is at his best, and Mitch Vogel will win your heart. Pure enjoyment!"

– North Carolina

"Very well casted. Cinematography is great and so is sound track. Strong performances from all actors. I especially liked Will Geer as the grandfather. The story is always engaging and never drags. Great entertainment for all ages. "

– Minnesota

Although "road film" and "Americana" suit it equally well, a "coming of age" tale is the cliché **"THE REIVERS"** seems most to be reaching for. Young Lucius "parts with his youth", as the narrator tells us, one summer day with the temperature close to 100° when his eyes first light on his grandfather's spanking new canary yellow Winton Flier. Eleven years old seems a trifle young to be parting with one's youth, but Faulkner only means to say that Lucius' eyes are opened in several ways to a larger world. He remains a young boy at the close of the story, but one with fewer illusions about himself and other people. If that's what "coming of age" means, then Lucius does it in a Memphis cat-house, on horseback, and through the severe counsels of his magisterial grandpa "Boss" (a winning performance from Will Geer).

In its day the film was chiefly of note for Steve McQueen acting against type as a dull-witted Mississippi swamp-rat by name of Boon Hogganbeck, a comedy turn which was more surprising than successful. McQueen was just too intelligent and self-possessed an actor for us to accept him as a hick farm-boy. And although the story touches on the darker themes of racial bigotry in the deep South, or the commonplace mishandling of whores (shades of

"UNFORGIVEN") the tone is too light and gay for it to say anything of value. It is a frivol, like a John Ford film with plenty of saloon brawls and badinage, but no real meanness.

The film's commentary on the racial question is illuminating. Rupert Crosse is a black skeleton in a white family closet, adopted as a foundling by Lucius' family owing to an indiscretion with a slave girl by Lucius' great-grandfather. He loses no opportunity to remind Boon – also adopted by the family as a child – that *"I'm kin and you ain't!"* **"THE REIVERS"** paints us a reconstruction South where white folks and black folks live largely amicably with one another, and racial prejudice can be something Lucius is wholly oblivious about until his illicit jaunt to Memphis. To a post-Civil Rights Amendment audience, this sounds like liberal whitewash (not to say hogwash) and, if true to Faulkner's writing, betrays a sentimental blindness to the uglier aspects of the culture of his childhood. But that need not necessarily be the case. It's equally possible, if counter-intuitive, that many turn of the century Southern whites accepted blacks more easily and comfortably than contemporary city whites do. Whichever is the truth of the matter, Faulkner, like Twain, tells a very different tale from **"MISSISSIPPI BURNING"**.

But the focus of the story (happily) is Mitch Vogel as Lucius, left at home for four days when his family attend the funeral of his maternal grandfather. Boon quickly spots his opportunity, and seduces Lucius into absconding with Boss's shiny new automobile to the bright lights of the city, where Boon's ladyfriend (Sharon Farrell) proves to be a whore-with-a-heart-of-gold, waiting for Mr Right in the unlikely surroundings of a convention brothel. Like many a screen prostitute before and since, she's exceptionally glamorous and virginal, and wouldn't look the least out of place as a Sunday school teacher. The well-mannered Lucius is smitten at once, fighting to defend her good name when bratty nephew Otis (Lindy Davis) informs him how she earns a living. "It ain't fair" Otis adds sulkily, "that only *women* kin earn money from pug-knuckling!" (though any boy with the name of Lindy should be well set to learn the error of *that* assumption.) He draws a knife on Lucius, injuring his hand, and Farrell is so touched by Lucius' chivalry she promises him to give up the life, a pledge not greatly to Boon's liking.

At this point Crosse, who stowed himself aboard for the ride to Memphis, announces that he's "swapped" the glittering new automobile (which wasn't his to trade) for a nag with the ominous name of "Lightning", and the promise of a horserace to win the car back. Lucius finds himself promoted to jockey, and on his shoulders falls the responsibility of retrieving Boss's prize possession. The sour and repugnant local sheriff comes sniffing around, spouting the word "nigger" repeatedly, and following a brawl everyone but Lucius lands in jail. They're released only after Farrell submits to the sheriff's appetites, for which sacrifice the angry Boon blacks her eye.

Enraged, Lucius refuses to go ahead with the horse race. In a tearful fury he rains blows on Boon for striking a woman, and announces "I'm all **done** stealing and lying!" He relents of course, and the no-hoper Lightning proves as good as his name when Crosse accidentally stumbles on his secret passion – for sardines.

Race won, the triumphant Lucius discovers a stony-faced Boss waiting for him among the crowd, so it's a long silent drive back home in anticipation of a sound whipping. But the shrewd Boss intercedes as Lucius' father is about to do his duty in the root cellar, saying it would be "too easy" on the boy to cancel out all his lying and disobedience so arbitrarily, and better to let him stew in his own guilt instead: Lucius blurts out all his sins to Boss, who is neither angry nor forgiving. "Are you afraid I won't trust you anymore? That I've lost my respect for you, because you're a liar? Well that's something you'll just have to live with." "Forever?" Lucius wails. "Not that long, but a while." "I can't!" the boy weeps. "Can't? You *can*! A gentleman can endure anything." And so the penitent boy is cradled in his arms, disgrace smarting more than the razor strop.

Outdoors, Boon tries to console Lucius by announcing he's to wed Farrell, and their first son will be named after him. Boon, Lucius and Crosse clamber into the Winton Flyer, now safely disabled, wheels removed, and the end music swells.

"**THE REIVERS**" tries so hard to be endearing, charming, comforting, but for me the spell did not work. It smacks too much of a Disney-eye view of Mississippi life, Steve McQueen is not remotely convincing as Boon, and the Rupert Crosse character is more irritating than feisty. Worth watching all the same for buxom Mitch Vogel, who is by far the more mature and responsible of the three, some fine supporting performances, and for a glorious early score from John Williams. The Burgess Meredith narrative conveys something of the flavour and richness of Faulkner's writing, and hints at what the film could have been in the hands of a more talented director.

[Mitch Vogel](#) was 13, and sadly under-used on the screen, his only other boyhood films being Lucille Ball's "**YOURS, MINE AND OURS**" (68), "**THE BOY FROM DEAD MAN'S BAYOU**" (71) and "**MENACE ON THE MOUNTAIN**" (71, with Eric Shea, a boy cut from a very similar cloth.) Nothing else is known of Lindy Davis.

See subject index under **BRATS** (for Otis), **CARS, COMEDY, DISCRIMINATION / PREJUDICE, GRANDPARENTS, HORSES & PONIES, ROAD FILMS** and **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS**.