

Rubber Tires

US : 1927 : dir. : Cecil B De Mille Silent : 52 min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Junior Coghlan](#)
 Bessie Love; Erwin Connelly; May Robson; Harrison Ford; John Patrick; Clarence Burton

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ≠ Z ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: *The Silents Majority*

The Silents Majority review:

"The Stacks family of New York has just received an official notice bearing bad news - their California house is going to be sold for the back taxes that are owed on it. Daughter Mary Ellen (played by Bessie Love) suggests they all pull up stakes, go to California, pay the taxes and live in the home there. "We'll sell the furniture, buy an auto, and roll to California on rubber tires," she says with enthusiastic determination.

After selling "all of the family antiques except Pa," Mary Ellen buys a dilapidated "four cylinder Tourist" from a very expressive Jewish junk dealer (unfortunately unbilled) who has to dig it out from under a ton of other junk on his lot. The scene now shifts to the office of the Tourist Motor Company. The executives are planning a huge ad campaign built around the first car the company ever made. They decide to put up billboards all over the country offering a \$10,000 reward for this car. Of course, this is the same car just purchased by our heroine.

So, with all their worldly belongings packed in the "new" car, Mary Ellen, Pa (played by Erwin Connelly), Ma (played by May Robson) and little brother Charlie (played by Junior Coghlan) leave New York and begin their cross-country journey, unaware of the value of their new acquisition. Meanwhile, Bill James (played by Harrison Ford) has just received a promotion in his job at the Berkshire Oil Company in Pennsylvania and goes to the local lunch counter to celebrate - and who should be at the lunch counter but Mary Ellen and her family.

Bill used to be their neighbor, and, more to the point, he was Mary Ellen's lover until they had

a spat and he was asked to leave town by her father. Once Bill finds out that Mary Ellen is on her way to California, he decides he's still smitten and that's where he wants to go, too. She is not happy about this and gathers the family together to leave. Enterprising Bill runs to a local garage and purchases a car to follow them, but it has no motor! Undeterred, and with an optimist's flair, he ropes his heap to a passing car and begins his merry pursuit.

However, Bill is not the only one after Mary Ellen Stacks. The little old junk dealer spots one of the billboards and to his dismay realizes he sold a car that could have brought him \$10,000! He sets out to find the Stacks family too.

The rest of the movie is a series of hilarious adventures along the windy road to California. At an auto camp, Mary Ellen meets Dudley Black (played by John Patrick) who Pa says won a "he-beauty contest." Dudley, who is going to California to become a Hollywood star, becomes Bill's rival for Mary Ellen's affections, adding an entertaining subplot to our story. Later, at another auto camp (the "Kosy Kamp in Kolorado") Pa trades the open-aired Tourist to a Mexican couple for their large, closed-in touring car which is almost as dilapidated.

Bill, Dudley, the Stacks family and the junk dealer converge at the auto camp. Each has their own reason for pursuing the hapless couple in the valuable car. It looks like they will never see the \$10,000 heap again. A lot happens to this travelling band before they reach their sunny destination. The Stacks have a flat tire, get stuck in the mud, break down several times and are robbed by some road agents who take the money that was to pay their back taxes on the house.

Plus, a finale that includes a wild ride down a mountainside - with no brakes - and a long-awaited physical showdown between rivals Dudley and Bill!

The Squeal on Rubber Tires

"**RUBBER TIRES**" (Cecil B. DeMille Pictures, 1927) is an entertaining little programmer that fell in between two of Bessie Love's biggest hits, "**THE LOST WORLD**" (First National, 1925), which was recently restored by the George Eastman House, and "**BROADWAY**

MELODY" (M-G-M, 1929). Although she makes a lovely heroine, she is not given much to do in the film except require constant rescuing by Harrison Ford - which is not a bad thing. There is plenty of energetic interaction, everything from untangling her foot from a bicycle wheel to chasing her down a mountainside in a runaway, brakeless car.

Miss Love was one of those stars who would have a big hit and then make several lesser movies in a row, such as **"RUBBER TIRES"**, before the next big hit. As Joe Franklin observed in *Classics of the Silent Screen: A Pictorial Treasury* (Citadel, 1959), "She seemed to be forever on the threshold of top stardom but never quite made it." Yet we still remember adorable Bessie Love today.

The film provides a much better vehicle for Harrison Ford as he chases the girl he loves across the country (although Mary Ellen doesn't require much of a chase, having given in to him early in the picture). Bill vies with Dudley for her affections and constantly rescues the poor Stacks family from the many predicaments in which they find themselves. Ford shows a knack for light comedy that is not often apparent in his past work as a matinee idol. He's quite engaging as Bessie's beau while tossing insults with verbal sparring partner Dudley.

By the time **"RUBBER TIRES"** was made, Ford was already beginning to see his popularity in decline after being one of the top stars of the late teens to mid-twenties. Some of his most memorable leading roles, which are being rediscovered, include **"SHADOWS"** (Preferred Pictures, 1922), with Lon Chaney; and **"LITTLE OLD NEW YORK"** (Cosmopolitan, for Goldwyn, 1923), **"JANICE MEREDITH"** (Cosmopolitan, for Metro-Goldwyn, 1924) and **"ZANDER THE GREAT"** (Cosmopolitan, for Metro-Goldwyn, 1925), all with Marion Davies.

Director Alan Hale, a character/comedy vet, did a great job with the gags in **"RUBBER TIRES"**. He had made a big name for himself

acting in such films as Douglas Fairbanks' **"ROBIN HOOD"** (United Artists, 1922), as Little John, and **"THE COVERED WAGON"** (Famous Players-Lasky, 1923), as the dastardly heavy, Sam Woodhull. In the late 1920's, Hale was given a fortuitous opportunity to direct several of many decent little programmers that the DeMille Studio released.

As the credits roll, **"RUBBER TIRES"** is a delightful film with well-defined characters, plenty of gripping gags, amusing action and a couple of good plot twists that are enough to hold the viewer's undivided attention. The print quality is fair, and the video release features an nonoriginal, poor and inappropriate musical score. This film is available on video from Grapevine Video."

- Review by Tim Lussier
Source: *The Silents Majority*



Excerpt from *Classics of the Silent Screen* filmography of Bessie Love:

"...roles like **"THE KING OF MAIN STREET"** and **"SOUL FIRE"** were disappointingly infrequent for Bessie. When she landed in a big smash-hit like **"THE LOST WORLD"**¹, her role was too conventional to attract much attention - especially with a herd of dinosaurs for competition! And starring roles in pleasant programmers like **"YOUNG APRIL"**, **"DRESS PARADE"**, and **"RUBBER TIRES"** - enjoyable though these films were - did little more than

¹ A friend of mine, who ran a small regional film company in the 1950s, met Bessie Love when he invited her to a private screening of **"THE LOST WORLD"**, and heard many first-hand anecdotes from her about how that 1925 film was made.

keep her name before the public, and prompt critics to remark periodically that her talent was being sadly wasted."

[no listing in "Hollywood in the Twenties", "A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Coghlan:

"This cheerful, brown-eyed Irish-American was just about the most likeable boy actor of the late silent screen. His father, Frank Coghlan, Sr., was a doctor, and his mother, Katherine, an actress. In early childhood he earned good money as a model, then followed his mother's profession to considerable effect. He hit the screen at the age of three, at \$3 a day.

Though Frank Junior could look sad and waifish if business required, he was irrepressibly optimistic by nature, and when the leading roles began to come they were of an active, self-reliant nature. In **"LET 'ER GO, GALLEGHER"** he was an orphaned newsboy with his own furnished flat (an abandoned taxicab), who became the sidekick of an investigative journalist. Other rewarding parts came in **"RUBBER TIRES"**, **"THE YANKEE CLIPPER"** (as a stowaway) and **"MARKED MONEY"**.

Sometimes, foreshadowing Mickey Rooney's persona of the mid-Thirties, he would be the rough street kid cast opposite the posh one, as he was with Philippe DeLacy in the military-school setting of **"SQUARE SHOULDERS"**. The chemistry was perfect.

The 1931 **"PENROD"** was Leon Janney and Frank Coghlan (as junior was now beginning to be called) was his Sam. The homely potato-faced boy was growing into a personable youth, and his child career was over. He was in the 1932 serial **"LAST OF THE MOHICANS"**, and played the four-year-old Shirley Temple's elder brother in a series called **"Frolics of Youth"**. He often cropped up in supporting parts in films of the Thirties, sometimes as a jockey (for he was a skilled rider), sometimes as gang leader in opposition to the Dead End Kids.

Then, just as his career was fading, came a lucky break: the still eager and innocent-looking Frank was cast in the leading role of radio reporter Billy Batson (for whom the invocation of "Shazam" worked wonders) in **"THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL"**. Launched in 1941, it was one of the most popular of all big-screen serials. Coghlan was Mickey Rooney's buddy in **"MEN OF BOYS TOWN"** (40) and many of the Andy Hardy films.

Having clocked up more than 300 screen appearances, he joined the U.S. Navy during World War Two, and stayed for 23 years, initially as a Naval Aviator and latterly as a Public Affairs Officer, proving an invaluable link between the Navy and Hollywood producers. Around the time of his retirement (in 1965, at the rank of Lieutenant Commander) he had a little role in **"THE SAND PEBBLES"**, and since then has combined public relations work in Los Angeles with dozens of appearances on film and TV - in recent years as "spokesman" for Curtis Mathes TV in their commercials."

One cannot fault the Silents Majority website for the enthusiasm and research behind their reviews, but child players – even the major ones – do not enjoy much attention there. We have no indication, for example, that Coghlan (11) played anything but a very minor background role in this film, although Holmstrom singles it out as one of his best. In the same year he made "**SLIDE, KELLY, SLIDE**", "**THE YANKEE CLIPPER**" and three others. His first reported film was "**THE POVERTY OF RICHES**" in 1921, but he was one of the fortunate players of his generation who made the transition to talkies without a hiatus. In "**THE PUBLIC ENEMY**" (31), for instance, he appeared with Frankie Darro in the eponymous boyhood prologue. His later films often wrung their hands in the social conscience vein, (let's mix those metaphors, and the consequences be damned!) with titles like "**HELL'S HOUSE**" (32), "**BOYS' REFORMATORY**" (39) and "**MEN OF BOYS' TOWN**" (40).

See subject index under **COMEDY, ROAD FILMS** and **SILENT CINEMA**.