

Switchback

US : 1997 : dir. Jeb Stuart : : 121 min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Ian Nelson](#)
 Dennis Quaid; Danny Glover; Jared Leto; R Lee Ermey; Ted Levine; William Fichtner

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω	□	≠	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

" "DIE HARD" / "FUGITIVE" screenwriter Stuart debuts as director of this thriller about the kidnapping of an FBI agent's son, and the pursuit of the serial killer who has him. Preposterous plot devices are overshadowed by excellent cast. You really care what happens to these people. Shot in Panavision. **½ "

Radio Times review:

"A refreshingly different variation on the over-used serial killer plot, cutting between Dennis Quaid's miserable FBI man on the trail of the killer he believes has kidnapped his son, and travelling companions Danny Glover and Jared Leto - both of whom are just suspicious enough

to be the culprit. Fine performances and a couple of pulsating action sequences makes this worth a view. Contains violence, swearing and nudity. *** "

"Thriller. When his son is kidnapped by a psychopath, FBI agent Frank LaCrosse travels to Texas to investigate a murder he believes has been committed by the same man. Then he becomes involved in a bitter political struggle between local lawmen as he desperately searches for his child. *** "

So far as this archive is concerned, the film only scrapes in by a whisker, being one of those kidnap thrillers ("THE BLACK WINDMILL", with Michael Caine, was another) where we see the child whisked away in the opening moments and only glimpse him or her again seconds before the end credits roll. Nevertheless kidnap dramas are of relevance, if only as an index of the child's worth in society. It's instructive that there are ten child kidnap films for every one child runaway film - runaways are an implied criticism of home and family, kidnap is an act of theft *from* the home and family.

"SWITCHBACK" is an engaging thriller, taken on its own lights, with an unusual narrative construction that holds the interest longer than most and, as Maltin says, an interesting cast for what is in essence a B movie - Quaid is more sombre than usual as the grimly determined father and AWOL FBI agent, Danny Glover is more engaging than usual as the former railroad man who picks up enigmatic young hitchhiker Leto in the desert, and R Lee Ermey ("FULL METAL JACKET") has a nice supporting role as sympathetic sheriff, with Ted Levine (the killer from "SILENCE OF THE LAMBS") as his deputy.

It is the teaser device of following the mismatched pair of Glover/Leto, neither of which is very forthcoming about his background, on their journey, as we suspect first one then the other,

which relieves the cop movie familiarity of serial killers, crime scenes and law enforcement politics. The characters are better drawn, as one would expect of a writer turned director.

Briefly, Quad was heading an FBI task force trailing a knife-killer who delighted (but don't they all) in playing cat and mouse with his pursuers. When the pursuit came too close the killer abducted Quaid's small son from the family home, killing a nanny in the process, and went to ground, leaving an enigmatic message for Quaid that the boy would only be recovered on the killer's death, and to achieve this Quaid must first "believe" him. Some while later an identical killing occurs in Texas and, even though the FBI task force has been disbanded on the belief the killer has taken his own life, Quaid disobeys his superiors and takes over the local investigation, disrupting in the process a contest between two rivals for election to county sheriff. Inadvertently he helps the incumbent (Ermev) to lose his job.

Even once we've satisfied ourselves who the killer actually is, an element of genuine doubt remains as to whether Quaid's son will be recovered alive, and although it resolves to the usual *mano a mano* contest between hunter and quarry, there isn't an over-reliance on set-piece action scenes or messy killings, but more emphasis on psychology. In that respect it's closer to Kevin Costner's "**A PERFECT WORLD**" than "**THE FUGITIVE**" (written by Stuart), and certainly a more interesting thriller than the latter, which was no B movie. The only major drawback is that, having piqued our curiosity over who is the killer, the film leaves us entirely in the dark as to his rationale and motivation. Twice he slays trusted friends and colleagues, with an arbitrariness that is more shocking than the murder of the nanny at the start. It would have been nice, particularly given the level of character development in general, to hear some inkling of his reason.

But to reiterate, the child himself, Andy (± 4) is on-screen for barely a few moments and the film is scarcely worth a glance on that basis. Hollywood still insists on its happy endings, and it's a rare film which will flout that law, even though real life is not so kind on kidnap victims.

See subject index under **KIDNAPPING, POLICE** and **ROAD FILMS**.