



Two-Lane Blacktop

Directed by: Monte Hellman

©/Production Companies: Universal Pictures,

Michael S. Laughlin Enterprises

Produced by: Michael Laughlin

Assistant to the Producer: Lee Wenner

Associate Producer: Gary Kurtz

Unit Production Manager: Walter Coblenz

Assistant Director: Ken Swor

Script Supervisor: Bonnie Prendergast

Casting: Fred Roos

Screenplay by: Rudy Wurlitzer, Will Corry

Story by: Will Corry

Director of Photography: Jack Deerson

Photography Adviser: Gregory Sandor

Editor: Monte Hellman

Custom Auto Design and Constructions:

Richard Ruth, William Kincheloe, H. Alan Deglin

Costumes: Richard Bruno

Title Design: Marion Sampler

Titles: Universal Title

Music Supervisor: Billy James

Music Editor: Synchrofilm

Sound: Edit-Rite, Inc

Technical Adviser: Jay Wheatley

Cast:

James Taylor (*the driver*)

Warren Oates (*G.T.O.*)

Laurie Bird (*the girl*)

Dennis Wilson (*the mechanic*)

David Drake (*Needles station attendant*)

Richard Ruth (*Needles station Mechanic*)

Rudy Wurlitzer (*hot rod driver*)

Jaclyn Hellman (*driver's girl*)

Bill Keller (*Texas hitch-hiker*)

Harry Dean Stanton (*Oklahoma hitch-hiker*)

Don Samuels (*1st Texas policeman*)

Charles Moore (*2nd Texas policeman*)

Tom Green (*Boswell station attendant*)

W.H. Harrison (*parts store owner*)

Alan Vint (*man in roadhouse*)

Illa Ginnaven (*waitress in roadhouse*)

George Mitchell (*driver at accident*)

Katherine Squire (*old woman*)

Melissa Hellman (*child*)

Jay Wheatley (*1st man at race track*)

Jim Mitcham (*2nd man at race track*)

Kreag Caffey (*boy with motorcycle*)

Tom Witenbarger (*pick-up driver*)

Glen Rogers (*soldier*)

USA 1971©

102 mins

Digital

Moviedrome transmission date: 6 August 1989

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AND
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Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

Two-Lane Blacktop

The screening on Wednesday 9 July will be introduced by season curator and Moviedrome's producer Nick Freand Jones

'What is a cult film? A cult film is one which has a passionate following but does not appeal to everybody. Just because a movie is a cult movie does not automatically guarantee quality. Some cult films are very bad. Others are very, very good. Some make an awful lot of money at the box office. Others make no money at all. Some are considered quality films. Others are exploitation.' From 1988 to 2000 *Moviedrome* was presented by Alex Cox and then Mark Cousins. Across that time, more than 200 features were shown, and generations of movie fans and filmmakers would be informed and inspired by the selection, alongside the wit and wisdom of the introductions that preceded each screening. *Moviedrome* was a portal into the world of weird and wonderful cinema. This two-month season features some of the most notable titles screened and wherever possible they are preceded by the original televised introduction.

Nick Freand Jones, season curator and producer of *Moviedrome*

Alex Cox: *Two-Lane Blacktop* is, after *Easy Rider*, the king of the road movies. It came out in 1971, around the same time as Francis Ford Coppola's *The Rain People*, *Five Easy Pieces* and Richard Sarafian's *Vanishing Point*. All of these are equally pessimistic variations on the same theme – which is, according to Rudy Wurlitzer, the writer of this film, that 'you can't escape from whatever you're trying to escape from, and the lesson of the road is that there is no lesson of the road'.

Two-Lane Blacktop, based on a TV movie script by Will Corry, tells the story of two existential hot-rod racers, played by the singer James Taylor and Dennis Wilson, drummer of the Beach Boys. They become involved in an obsessive road race with a flash Harry character played by Warren Oates, all competing for possession of a pink slip – that is, a car registration or ownership certificate. The two hot-rodders drive a souped-up old car; Oates has a brand new Pontiac GTO. The two mumble a lot and are really bad actors. Oates has the most amazing line of patter and incredible adventures. Also watch out for Harry Dean Stanton as the gay hitch-hiker.

The director, Monte Hellman, is a mysterious figure, who has made few films but has had a great deal of influence on his peers – Coppola, Peckinpah, the other road-movie directors, and especially Wim Wenders. Hellman and Oates did their best work in collaboration, particularly in *Cockfighter*, a film which unfortunately we can't see in Britain due to its subject matter. Oates was a great actor, one of the best of all American actors, and he lights up this film every time he appears.

Alex Cox's original introduction for *Moviedrome*. Also published in *Moviedrome: The Guide* (BBC, 1990). With thanks to moviedromer.tumblr.com

Monte Hellman on 'Two-Lane Blacktop'

What interested you in the original script for Two-Lane Blacktop? And what did you think was missing?

The fact is that I've never been presented with a script I liked. Here I liked the idea of two guys travelling across the country in a '55 Chevy challenging guys to race. The rest of it was banal.

Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

Welcome to the Moviedrome

Fri 4 Jul 18:30

The Wicker Man (Final Cut)

Fri 4 Jul 20:45 (+ intro by Alex Cox and Nick Freand Jones) Fri 18 Jul 18:00; Mon 28 Jul 21:00
Walker

Sat 5 Jul 15:10 (+ intro by filmmaker and Moviedrome presenter Alex Cox); Tue 29 Jul 20:40

The Fly (1958)

Sat 5 Jul 18:30 (+ intro by season curator and Moviedrome's producer Nick Freand Jones); Sun 13 Jul 15:20

The Fly (1986)

Sat 5 Jul 20:55; Sun 13 Jul 18:20

The Great Silence Il grande silenzio

Sun 6 Jul 12:10 (+ intro by filmmaker and Moviedrome presenter Alex Cox); Tue 15 Jul 20:40

Sweet Smell of Success

Sun 6 Jul 18:00 (+ intro by filmmaker and Moviedrome presenter Alex Cox); Mon 21 Jul 21:00

An American Werewolf in London

Mon 7 Jul 18:30; Sat 26 Jul 21:00

Get Carter

Mon 7 Jul 20:45; Thu 17 Jul 20:30; Tue 22 Jul 18:10

Les Diaboliques

Tue 8 Jul 20:35 (+ intro by season curator and Moviedrome's producer Nick Freand Jones); Sat 12 Jul 11:35

Two-Lane Blacktop

Wed 9 Jul 20:45 (+ intro by season curator and Moviedrome's producer Nick Freand Jones); Sat 19 Jul 18:20

Witchfinder General

Fri 11 Jul 18:20 (+ intro by Reece Shearsmith); Mon 14 Jul 20:50

California Dolls (aka All the Marbles)

Sat 12 Jul 15:10; Wed 23 Jul 20:40 (+ intro by season curator and Moviedrome's producer Nick Freand Jones)

Shaft

Sat 12 Jul 18:20; Sat 19 Jul 20:50

Scarface

Sat 12 Jul 19:50; Sun 27 Jul 14:10

Exotica

Mon 21 Jul 18:10; Wed 30 Jul 20:45 (+ pre-recorded intro by filmmaker Atom Egoyan)

La Haine

Fri 25 Jul 21:00; Thu 31 Jul 18:00

Clockers

Sat 26 Jul 18:00; Thu 31 Jul 20:20

With thanks to

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What intrigued you about [Rudy] Wurlitzer's writing?

I liked his sense of humour. He was extremely funny. I think all my scripts are funny.

What were you after in this film?

I was interested in what has happened to love, for one thing. What contemporary attitudes towards love are as opposed to traditional attitudes, and how much romance is left in a non-romantic world ... I don't know how much *is* left in the world, but there's a lot left in our movie. We're in a world where love has been rejected, but people still have a nostalgia for it, and I think that's what we deal with in this film.

Are you a romantic?

I'm romantic in the sense that Camus was romantic. I ... feel a nostalgia for what cannot be.

Would you describe Blacktop as a love story? Who loves whom?

I always felt it was a love story. The girl loves the driver; the mechanic loves the girl and the driver, and he can't decide between them and can't accept his love for either. And the driver wants to love the girl, but can't.

I've always felt there was a profound absence of love in Blacktop...

Well, I've expressed these things to Rudy, but I don't know if he wrote exactly that story ... Maybe audiences will see it differently, too. But I've always seen the driver as the same sort of character that Aznavour plays in *Tirez sur le pianiste*. He appeals to me too. It's a guy who is so involved with his own existential dilemma, just dealing with himself as a person, that he throws away the thing he wants most, which is love. He can't deal with those needs in time, and that becomes his tragedy.

You don't think the cars, the roads, and the quintessential Americanness of the characters are significant?

That's just a cultural appendage ... side effects. A way to augment the reality.

You haven't mentioned one of the two major characters, G.T.O. (played by Warren Oates). What function does he serve?

G.T.O. is time ... God, that sounds pretentious. Look, I'm evolving, I'm getting older. My films have to reflect this. G.T.O.'s function is as a reference to the process of time. A reminder of mortality. The idea of time is a double-edged element. The illusion and delusion of time ... Cars, roads, speed are one thing. G. T.O. sings 'Time Is on My Side'. Well, it's not. And the love thing is involved with him too. The temporal nature of love, or at least of sexual love. He has been through it. He's part of the generation gap.

There is a confusion in people's minds about what the essential elements of a movie are. We create 'genres' – the road picture, the melodrama, the Western ... I don't think those are good categories. Certain movies are made over and over again, each through a different director's vision. The prototypes for *Blacktop* are Minnelli's *The Clock*, Lelouch's *Un homme et une femme*, Nichols' *The Graduate*, Wilder's *The Apartment*. They are all the same story, told against a different background.

Interview by Beverly Walker, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1970-71