



Big Screen Classics

Planes, Trains & Automobiles

Planes, Trains & Automobiles

Director: John Hughes

Production Companies: Paramount Pictures Corporation, Hughes Entertainment

Executive Producers: Michael Chinich, Neil A. Machlis

Producer: John Hughes

Associate Producer: Bill Brown

Unit Production Manager: Neil A. Machlis

NY Unit Production Manager: Thomas A. Razzano

Production Office Co-ordinator:

Katharine Ann Curtiss

Location Manager: Robert J. Goldstein

Chicago Location Manager: Billy Higgins

NY Location Co-ordinator: Lydia Dean Pilcher

Production Assistants: Peter Carley, Tim McNeal,

Scott Nimerfro, Julie Donall, Jono Abrams

Chicago 2nd Unit Directors: Bennie Dobbins,

Bill Brown

Assistant Directors: Mark A. Radcliffe,

Arthur Anderson, Jeanne Caliendo

NY Assistant Directors: Pat Burns, Tom Lisi,

Jim Greenhut

Chicago Assistant Director: James R. Giovannetti Jr

2nd Unit Assistant Director: Richard Graves

Castings Janet Hirshenson, Jane Jenkins

Extras Casting: Barbara Flinn, Central Casting

New York Casting: Simon and Kumin

Chicago Casting: Holzer Roche Casting

Chicago Extras Casting: Richard S. Kordos,

Nan Charbonneau

Screenplay: John Hughes

Director of Photography: Don Peterman

Camera Operators: Keith Peterman, Jeffrey Laszlo

Special Effects: Stan Parks, Bill Aldridge

Editor: Paul Hirsch

Additional Editors: Peck Prior, Andrew London,

Adam Bernardi

Production Designer: John W. Corso

Art Director: Harold Michelson

Set Designer: Louis Mann

Set Decorators: Jane Bogart, Linda Spheeris

Costume Designer: April Ferry

Key Costumers: Paul Lopez, Silvio Scarano

Mr Martin's Costumer: Dennis Schoonderwoerd

Make-up Artist: Frank Griffin

Make-up Design for Mr Candy: Ben Nye Jr

Titles and Opticals: Pacific Title

Music: Ira Newborn

Orchestrations: Don Nemitz

Music Co-ordinator: Ron Payne

Music Supervisor: Tarquin Gotch

Music Editor: Jeff Carson

Music Editing: Segue Music

Music Recording: Gary Ladinsky

Sound Recording: James Alexander

Sound Re-recording: John Reitz, Dave Campbell,

Gregg Rudloff

Supervising Sound Editors: Wylie Stateman,

Lon E. Bender

Sound Editors: Lorna Anderson, Victor Grodecki,

Chris Jargo, Randy Kelley, Larry Kemp, Dan Rich,

Hugo Weng

ADR Supervisor: Stan Gilbert

Foley Artists: Dean Drabin, Gary Hecker,

Alicia Stevenson

Stunt Co-ordinator: Bennie Dobbins

Stunts: Kent Hays, Bill Lane

Stunt Drivers: Corey Eubanks, Michael Tillman

Stunt Double for Steve Martin: Bob Jauregui

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Promoted as teen-movie guru John Hughes' first adult comedy, no doubt on the strength of a number of profanity-laden sequences, *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* is an enjoyable addition to the mismatched travelling companions road movie. Ultimately erring towards sentimentality and mawkishness, there is nonetheless an unexpected darkness at the film's core. Hughes quite deftly balances the film's comic and dramatic elements, interspersing the moments of absurdist humour dealing with the horror of interpersonal contact and a world in which even the most mundane objects seem destined to thwart and frustrate with oddly disquieting observations on the impossibility of companionship and what it means to be alone.

En route to Chicago to spend Thanksgiving with his family, irascible businessman Neal Page (Steve Martin) finds that his first-class plane ticket has been demoted, forcing him to share his flight with boorish shower-curtain-ring salesman Del Griffith (John Candy). A sudden snowstorm in Chicago forces the plane to land in Wichita, Kansas, and unable to find four-star accommodation, Neal is compelled to accept Del's invitation to flop at his more modest motel. Driven to distraction by Del's annoying personal habits, the ungrateful Neal lets forth with a stream of verbal abuse. Left somewhat shamefaced by Del's obvious offence and hurt, Neal tries to make amends by agreeing to act as a travelling companion back to Chicago. However, tensions soon reappear alongside Del's inane anecdotes as the pair's journey assumes increasingly desperate and ultimately epic levels after encounters involving a train, a tractor and a hired car.

Etching the loneliness of its protagonists in a number of well-written scenes that assert a mutual sense of alienation despite Neal's trappings of money and family, the film ultimately motors towards redemption; in time-honoured fashion the mismatched pair are bosom buddies at the end of their cross-country odyssey, with all quirks and hostilities forgotten. This conciliation is sealed when Del receives an invite to Neal's sumptuous Thanksgiving dinner. But still there lingers the sense that he will undoubtedly have to return to his more modest world, and Neal will similarly revert to reactionary, bullying type.

Though not quite vintage Martin, *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* certainly has more than its fair share of extremely funny moments and is fondly remembered for a scene in which the incompatibles share a bed, only for Neal to confuse Del's buttocks for pillows. Some of the sight gags are similarly crude but nonetheless effective: a seemingly inevitable car crash precipitating the digging of nails into the dashboard followed by a blink-and-you'll-miss-it insert shot to reveal the passenger's reversion to skeleton form. The two leads work well together too, Candy giving a career-best performance as an incorrigible but ultimately endearing travelling companion, the perfect comic foil to Martin's frustrated, maniacal but not too monstrous Everyman.

Jason Wood, *100 Road Movies* (BFI Screen Guides, 2007)

Stunt Double for John Candy: Jeff Jenson
Stunt Double for Mr Hankin/Mr Baker:
Rick Lefevour
Dolby Stereo Consultant: Claus Wiedemann
Animal Trainer: Scott Hart

Cast:

Steve Martin (*Neal Page*)
John Candy (*Del Griffith*)
Laila Robbins (*Susan Page*)
Michael McKean (*state trooper*)
Kevin Bacon (*taxi racer*)
Dylan Baker (*Owen*)
Carol Bruce (*Joy*)
Olivia Burnette (*Marti*)
Diana Douglas (*Peg*)
Martin Ferrero (*motel clerk*)
Larry Hankin (*Doobie, cab driver*)
Richard Herd (*Walt*)
Susan Kellerman (*waitress*)
Matthew Lawrence (*little Neal*)
Edie McClurg (*car-rental agent*)
George Petrie (*Martin*)
Gary Riley (*motel thief*)
Charles Tyner (*Gus*)
Susan Isaacs (*Marie*)
Julie Newcomb (*Owen's wife*)
John Randolph Jones (*cab dispatcher*)
Nicholas Wyman (*New York lawyer*)
Gaetano Lisi (*New York cab driver*)
Diana Castle (*stewardess*)
Bill Erwin (*man on plane*)
Ruth De Soza (*New York ticket agent*)
Debra Lamb (*stripper*)
Ben Stein (*Wichita airport rep*)
Kim Genell (*receptionist*)
Grant Forsberg (*brand manager*)
David Raiport (*café patron*)
Andrew J. Hentz (*bus lover*)
Karen Meisinger (*bus loverette*)
Gary Palmer (*pilot*)
Diana Nieman, Sylvia Vitrungs, Joann Taylor,
Julie A. Herbert, Jennifer Allswang, Wendy Lee
Avon, Amy Meyers (*earrings customers*)
John A. Moio (*screaming driver*)
Victoria Vanderkloot (*screaming driver's wife*)
USA 1987©
92 mins
Digital 4K

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A contemporary review

In something of a departure from his recent teen movies, John Hughes constructs a comedy about two adults struggling with life's vicissitudes and each other. Much of the film's pleasure lies in the wit of the script and performances: Steve Martin as wealthy, intolerant advertising executive Neal Page, and John Candy as shower-curtain ring salesman Del Griffith ('Go with the flow' he advises), whose loud mouth and dress and terrible personal habits hide a true forbearance and heart of gold. An intimate relationship is forced on them when Neal is drawn into Del's chaotic world by a series of transport problems and attendant mishaps during a Thanksgiving trip from New York to Chicago. Much of the humour is based on class, encapsulated in the credit cards each owns – Neal's Visa and Nieman Marcus against Del's small-town Tall Man Shop.

Del Griffith fills the screen with the effluence of his life style – scattered Crackerjack boxes, burst beer cans, discarded clothes – which crowd Neal into constant confrontation with his unwanted but inescapable co-traveller. Del's plethora of consumables and chatty personality take the place of Neal's solvency and loving family, and it is this recognition and subtle expose of the divide between haves and have nots, in both a financial and emotional sense, which informs the film's broad comedy. The scenes of Neal's 'perfect' family which are interspersed with the journey echo those in films like *Fatal Attraction* and *Someone to Watch Over Me*, as does the presentation of city life (here extended to encompass travel) as alienating and intolerable. The family is seen as life's focus and anchor, to be striven for through unimaginable difficulties. But in *Planes, Trains & Automobiles*, the underlying socialism subverts any Reaganite interpretation of the reunion between Neal, his wife, children and in-laws as Del looks on and Thanksgiving dinner waits.

Another pleasing aspect of *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* is its emphasis on the possibility of male friendship which goes beyond conventional areas such as work and macho camaraderie to an understanding of emotional needs and a certain thoughtfulness. Neal and Del's homophobia when they are first forced to share a room develops into an enjoyment of each other's company when Neal invites Del to join him in the second motel – 'Why do I feel like I'm in summer camp?' Neal asks – their joking and philosophising aided by consumption of the room's supply of alcoholic miniatures. The other characters encountered en route are as well observed as the central duo, from Larry Hankin's hot-rod taxi driver to Edie McClurg's affronted car-rental agent, each ensuring Neal suffers maximum irritation along the way, but also by the end prompting his remark that he's a 'little wiser'.

Janet Hawken, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, June 1988