

Six Memorable Comedy Films that became Nine

Haywards Heath & District Probus Club



Introduction

I have written two other papers about memorable films. The first was about films in general; the second was about musicals. The paper you are about to read is about films that made you giggle or laugh – comedies. Although I set out to choose only six comedies, I have ended up with nine films which I decided to keep to avoid the anguish of omitting worthy candidates. I hope you enjoy what I have written even though you may disagree with my selection:

- When Harry Met Sally...
- Uncle Buck
- Planes, Trains and Automobiles
- City Slickers
- The Court Jester
- As Good as it Gets
- The Return of the Pink Panther
- Genevieve
- The General

Just to set the record straight, the films listed above and explained below are presented in the order I chose them, rather than the best comedy downwards. Taking a helicopter view of my selection, I see several romantic comedies, which confirms what I always thought – I'm a big softie at heart.

When Harry Met Sally... (1989)

Picture Credit: "When Harry Met Sally" by Lea Ann Belter Bridal is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)



When Harry Met Sally... is a 1989 American romantic comedy film¹ written by **Nora Ephron** and directed by **Rob Reiner**. It stars **Billy Crystal** as Harry and **Meg Ryan** as Sally. The story follows the title characters from when they meet in Chicago just before sharing a cross-country drive and continues through twelve years of chance encounters in New York City. The film addresses but fails to resolve questions along the lines of "Can men and women ever just be friends?"

The soundtrack consists of sparkling standards from **Harry Connick Jr.**, with a big band and orchestra arranged by **Marc Shaiman**. The soundtrack also features performances by **Louis Armstrong**, **Ella Fitzgerald**, **Frank Sinatra**, **Ray Charles**, and **Bing Crosby**. Connick won his first Grammy Award for Best Jazz Male Vocal Performance for his work on the soundtrack.

The film was released by Columbia Pictures in selected US cities, letting word of mouth generate interest before gradually expanding distribution. The film grossed \$92.8 million in North America and was released to critical acclaim. Ephron received a British Academy Film Award, an Oscar nomination, and a Writers Guild of America Award nomination for her screenplay. The film is ranked 23rd on **AFI's 100 Years... 100 Laughs** list of the top comedy films in American cinema and number 60 on **Bravo's "100 Funniest Movies"**. In early 2004, the film was adapted for the stage in a production starring **Luke Perry** and **Alyson Hannigan**.

¹ Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

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The Plot

In 1977, Harry Burns and Sally Albright graduated from the University of Chicago and shared a drive to New York City, where Sally is beginning journalism school, and Harry is starting a career. Harry has been dating Sally's friend Amanda. During the drive, Harry and Sally discuss their differing ideas about relationships; Sally disagrees with Harry's that men and women cannot be friends as "the sex part gets in the way". At a diner, Harry tells Sally she is very attractive, and she angrily accuses him of making a pass at her. They part in New York on unfriendly terms.

Five years later, in 1982, Harry and Sally find themselves on an aeroplane flight. Sally is dating Harry's neighbour Joe, and Harry is engaged to Helen, which surprises Sally. Harry suggests they become friends, forcing him to qualify his previous position about the impossibility of male-female friendships. They part, concluding that they will not be friends, and go their separate ways. They don't meet again until 1987, when they run into each other in a bookstore. Over coffee, they talk about their previous relationships; Sally and Joe broke up because she wanted a family, but Joe did not want to marry. Harry's wife Helen left him for another man. Harry and Sally take a walk, after which they decide to pursue a friendship. They have late-night phone conversations, go to dinner, and spend time together, openly discussing their love lives. During a New Year's Eve party, Harry and Sally find themselves attracted to each other. Even though they remain friends, they set each other up with their respective best friends, Marie and Jess. When the four go to a restaurant, it's Marie and Jess who quickly fall for each other and later become engaged.

One night, while talking on the phone, Sally tearfully tells Harry that her ex is getting married. He rushes to her apartment to comfort her and in Sally's vulnerable state, they begin kissing and have sex. When Harry leaves the following day, he feels awkward and is filled with regret. Their friendship cools until they have a heated argument at Jess and Marie's wedding when Sally angrily slaps Harry. He attempts to mend their friendship, but Sally feels that they cannot be friends.

Sally feels lonely without Harry by her side at a 1988 New Year's Eve party ringing in the new year. Harry spends New Year's eve alone, watching TV. Before midnight, he walks around the city. As Sally decides to leave the party before midnight, Harry appears and declares his love for her. She argues that the only reason he is there with her is that he is lonely, but then he lists the many things he has realised he loves about her. They then have that special New Year's midnight kiss. Harry and Sally marry three months later, exactly 12 years and three months after their first meeting.

The film contains several interlaced and interspersed segments where fictitious older married couples narrate to the camera their stories of how they met. The last couple interviewed, before the closing credits, is Harry and Sally.

Cast

- **Billy Crystal** as Harry Burns
- **Meg Ryan** as Sally Albright
- **Carrie Fisher** as Marie
- **Bruno Kirby** as Jess
- **Steven Ford** as Joe
- **Lisa Jane Persky** as Alice
- **Michelle Nicastro** as Amanda Reese
- **Kevin Rooney** as Ira Stone
- **Harley Kozak** as Helen Hillson
- **Estelle Reiner** as Female Customer

Katz's Delicatessen



Brothers Morris and Hyman Iceland established what is now known as Katz's Delicatessen on Ludlow Street in New York's Lower East Side in 1888. Upon the arrival of Willy Katz in 1903, the Jewish restaurant's name was changed from Iceland Brothers to Iceland & Katz. Willy's cousin Benny joined him in 1910, buying out the Iceland brothers to form Katz's Delicatessen. Today, Katz's Delicatessen is one of the most famous and longest-standing restaurants in New York. Katz's was the site of Meg Ryan's fake orgasm scene, followed by Estelle Reiner's memorable line, as a customer, "I'll have what she's having".

Picture Credit: "When Harry Met Sally" by le père is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

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Uncle Buck (1989)

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Uncle Buck is a 1989 American comedy film² written and directed by John Hughes. Starring John Candy and Amy Madigan, the film tells the story of a bachelor and, not to beat about the bush, an untidy and unreliable slob who babysits his brother's rebellious teenage daughter and her younger brother and sister. *Uncle Buck* was released in US theatres on 16th August 1989 by Universal Pictures and grossed \$79.2 million against a \$15 million budget.

Plot

The story revolves around the Russell family - Bob and Cindy Russell and their three children, 15-year-old Tia, 8-year-old Miles, and 6-year-old Maizy. They have recently moved from Indianapolis to the suburbs of Chicago, following Bob's promotion. Late one night, they receive a

phone call from Cindy's aunt in Indianapolis informing them that her father has had a heart attack. They make plans to leave immediately to be with him.

After hearing the news, Tia, bitter about being forced to move from Indianapolis, accuses her mother of abandoning her father. Bob suggests asking his brother Buck to come and watch the children, to which Cindy at first objects; she considers Buck a bad influence and a failure. The Russells' enjoy a middle-class lifestyle, Buck, on the other hand, lives in a small apartment in Wrigleyville, not far from Wrigley Field, the home of the Chicago Cubs. He drinks, smokes cigars and earns his living by betting on rigged horse races. He also drives a clapped-out 1977 Mercury car that backfires most of the time.

Fearful of the effect Buck will have on her children, Cindy suggests to Bob that they ask their neighbours for help instead but finds they are holidaying in Florida, leaving Buck as their only option. Although Buck cheerfully accepts the job, he finds himself at odds with his girlfriend of eight years, Chance. She wants to get married and start a family, but Buck is reluctant to do so as he loves his lifestyle. Still, to quell her dissatisfaction, Buck has grudgingly accepted a new job at her tyre shop. When he informs her that he cannot start his job yet due to his brother's family emergency, Chance assumes Buck is trying, as usual, to lie his way out of working.

Upon arriving, Buck is confronted with Cindy's cold demeanour towards him. Looking around, he finds he has been edited out of Bob and Cindy's wedding picture. Nevertheless, he quickly befriends Miles and Maizy, but the rebellious Tia is brash and hostile, and the two engage in a battle of wills.

When Buck meets Tia's cocky, obnoxious boyfriend, Bug, he warns her that Bug is only interested in her for sex and repeatedly thwarts her plans to sneak away on dates with him. Over the next several days, he deals with several situations in comedic fashion, including taking the kids to his favourite bowling alley, making enormous pancakes for Miles' birthday, ejecting a drunk birthday clown from the property, berating the school's overly strict assistant principal about Maizy's behaviour in class, and handling the laundry when the washing machine does not work.

Eventually, Tia exacts revenge on Buck for meddling in her relationship by tricking Chance into thinking Buck is cheating on her with their neighbour, Marcie. The next day, Chance comes over to confront Buck about what Tia told her but is furious to find Buck dancing with Marcie in the living room; This is too much for Chance, and she leaves.

² Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

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The following weekend, concerned after Tia sneaks out to a party, Buck decides to go looking for her rather than attend a horse race which would have provided him with enough money for the entire following year. He calls and begs Chanice to watch Miles and Maizy while he searches for Tia. At the party, thinking that Bug is taking advantage of her in a bedroom, he forces the door open by drilling out the lock, but walks in on Bug forcing himself on another girl.

After Buck finds Tia wandering the streets, she tearfully apologises to him and acknowledges he was right about Bug. Buck then reveals Bug, bound and gagged with duct tape, in the boot of his car. After intimidating him, Buck lets Bug out of the trunk to apologise to her. When Bug is finally released, he threatens to sue Buck and retracts his apology but flees in fear after Buck strikes him with a golf ball.

At home, Tia helps Buck reconcile with Chanice by admitting her mischief and tells Chanice that Buck would be a good husband and father. Buck also agrees to start his job at the garage, and he and Chanice reunite.

Cindy's father recovers, and she and Bob return home from Indianapolis. Upon entering the house, Tia surprises her mother with a hug. The entire Russell family says farewell to Buck and Chanice as they leave for Chicago, with Buck and Tia exchanging a loving wave goodbye.

Cast

- **John Candy** as Buck Russell
- **Jean Louisa Kelly** as Tia Russell
- **Macaulay Culkin** as Miles Russell
- **Gaby Hoffmann** as Maizy Russell
- **Garrett M. Brown** as Bob Russell
- **Elaine Bromka** as Cindy Russell
- **Amy Madigan** as Chanice Kobolowski
- **Jay Underwood** as Bug
- **Brian Tarantina** as E. Roger Coswell
- **Laurie Metcalf** as Marcie Dahlgren-Frost
- **Suzanne Shepherd** as Asst. Principal Anita Hoargarth
- **Mike Starr** as Pooter, the Clown
- **William Windom** as the voice of Mr Hatfield

Production

The film was the first one directed, written, and produced by John Hughes under a multi-picture agreement deal with Universal. Filming began on January 4, 1989, in Chicago. The company decided to keep the production facilities and locations as close as possible. The vacant New Trier High School in Northfield, Illinois, was chosen for the production facility. Three of its gyms were converted into sound stages on which several sets were constructed, including the two-leveled interior of the Russell House, Buck's bedroom, and smaller sets.

The school was also equipped to suit the needs of the cast and crew behind-the-scenes, classrooms for the young actors, offices, dressing rooms, wardrobe department, editing facilities, a special effects shop, equipment storage areas, and a projection booth.

Production designer John Corso began designing the sets in October 1988, and within seven weeks, his construction crew of twelve carpenters and five painters began work on the two levels of the Russell house. The elementary school corridor, the boys' restroom, the principal's office, and a classroom were filmed at Wilmette's Romona Elementary School. A colonial-style house in Evanston was chosen for the exterior of the Russell house. The exteriors and practical locations were shot in Chicago and other locations.

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Planes, Trains and Automobiles (1987)



*Planes, Trains and Automobiles*³ is a 1987 American comedy film written, produced, and directed by **John Hughes**⁴. It stars **Steve Martin** as Neal Page, a highly-strung marketing executive, and the over-sized **John Candy** as Del Griffith, a goodhearted but annoying salesman who appears to be worldly-wise. Despite their differences, they share a three-day odyssey of misadventures trying to get Neal home to Chicago in time for Thanksgiving Day dinner with his family. The film received critical acclaim, with many praising it for Hughes branching out from teen comedies and for the performances of Candy and Martin. Watching it has become a Thanksgiving Day tradition for some people.

Plot

Neal Page is an advertising executive on a business trip in New York City, eager to return to his family in Chicago before Thanksgiving, which is two days away. After a late-running business meeting with an indecisive client, Neal has difficulty and very bad luck trying to get a cab during rush hour. As he bribes a man to let him have a cab he's hailed, it is unwittingly taken by a third man. Neal gets to LaGuardia Airport just as his flight is delayed. While waiting, he meets Del Griffith, a talkative man who earns his living selling shower curtain rings. Neal recognises Del as the man who "stole" his cab. To his chagrin (and Del's delight), Neal is assigned a seat next to Del on the crowded plane to O'Hare airport.

Due to a blizzard in Chicago, their plane is diverted to Wichita, where they are forced to spend the night. Neal cannot get a room, but Del – a travelling salesman in curtain rings – has successfully secured one, and Neal reluctantly accepts his invitation to share it. During check-in, Del mistakenly takes Neal's credit card. In the small room, Neal loses his temper over Del's irritating behaviour, and Del criticises Neal's lack of gratitude for his hospitality, but they make peace and awkwardly share the only bed. While they sleep, their cash is stolen by a burglar.

With air travel still delayed the following day, Neal buys them both train tickets to Chicago, but with seats in separate cars. However, the locomotive breaks down near Jefferson City, Missouri, stranding its passengers in a field. Neal takes pity on Del struggling with his luggage, reuniting them.

³ Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

⁴ Hughes also worked with Candy two years later on *Uncle Buck*.

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They travel on a crowded bus to St. Louis, where Del raises cash by selling curtain ring samples to passersby as earrings. Neal offends Del over lunch, and predictably, the two angrily part ways again.

At St. Louis airport, Neal attempts to rent a car, but it is not there when he gets to the parking lot, so he returns to the terminal where his profanity-filled tirade offends the agent. He attempts to hire a taxi to Chicago but furiously insults the dispatcher, who punches him. By chance, Del arrives at the scene in his own rental car and takes the dazed Neal with him. As they drive, they resume arguing, and after nightfall, Del nearly gets them killed by going in the wrong direction on a freeway. While they compose themselves by the side of the road, Del's carelessly discarded cigarette sets fire to the car's interior. Neal initially gloats, thinking that Del is liable for the damage, until Del reveals that he'd found Neal's credit card in his wallet instead of his own and used it to rent the car.

With their cards now destroyed in the fire, Neal barter's his expensive watch for a motel room, only for himself. Del has nothing of value, so he attempts to sleep in the roofless car. Neal eventually feels sympathy for Del and invites him in from the cold. They share Del's collection of miniature liquor bottles and laugh about the events of the past two days. The pair resume driving to Chicago the following day, but their badly damaged car is impounded by the police as unroadworthy. Del persuades a refrigerated truck driver to take them into Chicago.

At a Chicago elevated station⁵, Neal sincerely thanks Del for getting him home, and they part ways with affection. As Neal rides a commuter train to his neighbourhood, he thinks about the trip, recalling some of Del's odd comments and silences during the journey, and it suddenly occurs to him that Del hasn't actually been trying to get home himself. He returns to the station, where he finds Del still sitting. Del explains that he doesn't have a home and that the beloved wife he's talked about died eight years earlier. Neal brings Del home for Thanksgiving dinner, introducing his family to his new and dear friend.

Cast

- **Steve Martin** as Neal Page
- **John Candy** as Del Griffith
- **Laila Robins** as Susan Page
- **Michael McKean** as State Trooper
- **Kevin Bacon** as man running for a taxi
- **Dylan Baker** as Owen
- Lulie Newcomb as Owen's wife
- **Olivia Burnette** as Marti Page
- **Larry Hankin** as Doobie
- **Richard Herd** as Walt
- **Matthew Lawrence** as Neal Page, Jr.
- **Edie McClurg** as Car Rental Agent
- **Bill Erwin** as Man on Plane
- **Ben Stein** as Wichita airport representative
- **Diana Dill** as Peg
- **Charles Tyner** as Gus Mooney
- **Lyman Ward** as John
- **Martin Ferrero** as 2nd Motel Clerk

Filming

Planes, Train and Automobiles, was filmed in 85 days, mainly in Batavia, and South Dayton, New York. A scene that takes place in St. Louis was filmed at Lambert International Airport.⁶ There was also a scene in Braidwood, Illinois, at the Sun Motel.

Box office

The movie opened in American theatres on 25th November 1987 (the Wednesday before Thanksgiving) and finished third for the weekend, grossing \$7 million. After its first five days, the film grossed \$10 million and stayed in the top ten for seven weeks. The movie finished its twelve-week American run on 22nd January 1988, reaching nearly \$50 million, against a production budget of \$15 million.

Reception

The film marked a widely noticed change in the directing repertoire of John Hughes. Upon release, it was greeted with critical acclaim, a surprise since Hughes was considered a teen **angst** filmmaker. It also got two thumbs up from **Siskel & Ebert**, with **Gene Siskel** declaring it John Candy's best role to date.

⁵ The rapid transit system serving the city of Chicago and some of its surrounding suburbs in the US state of Illinois, is known as "Chicago L".

⁶ St. Louis Lambert International Airport, formerly Lambert–St. Louis International Airport, is an international airport serving metropolitan St. Louis, Missouri, United States.

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City Slickers (1991)



Screen Clip from Fandango MOVIECLIPS, at: <https://youtu.be/PunAKeccqyU> (The Secret of Life (1991) © Copyright and other rights acknowledged and respected

*City Slickers*⁷ is a 1991 American Western comedy film, directed by **Ron Underwood** and starring **Billy Crystal**, **Daniel Stern**, **Bruno Kirby**, and **Jack Palance**, with supporting roles by **Patricia Wettig**, **Helen Slater**, and **Noble Willingham** with **Jake Gyllenhaal** in his debut. The story is about three married urban males experiencing midlife crises. They decide to reignite their masculinity by taking a supervised cattle drive across south-western US. The journey is laden with twists and turns.

For his performance, Jack Palance won the **Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor**.

The film's screenplay was written by **Lowell Ganz** and **Babaloo Mandel**, and it was shot in New York City; New Mexico; Durango, Colorado; and Spain. A sequel *City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold*, was released in 1994, with the same cast, except for Kirby, who was replaced by **Jon Lovitz**.

Plot

In Pamplona, Spain, middle-aged friends Mitch Robbins, Ed Furrilo and Phil Berquist participate in the running of the bulls. Back home in New York City, Mitch realises he and his pals use adventure trips as escapism from their mundane lives. Mitch hates his radio advertising sales job. Phil is trapped in a loveless marriage to a shrewish wife while managing his father-in-law's supermarket (who also bullies Phil). Ed is a successful sporting goods salesman who recently married a much younger woman but, unwilling to fully settle down, resists starting a family.

At Mitch's 39th birthday party, Phil and Ed give Mitch a trip for all three to go on a two-week cattle drive from New Mexico to Colorado. Phil's 20-year-old employee unexpectedly arrives at the party and announces she is pregnant with his baby, causing Phil's wife, Arlene, to walk out. Mitch's wife, Barbara, insists he go on the cattle drive to soul-search for a new purpose in his life. In New Mexico, the trio meet ranch owner (Clay Stone) and their fellow cattle drivers: entrepreneurial brothers Barry and Ira Shalowitz, young and attractive Bonnie, and father-son dentists, Ben and Steve Jessup. Mitch confronts ranch hands, Jeff and TR, when they begin sexually harassing Bonnie. Trail boss Curly intervenes, though he inadvertently humiliates Mitch.

⁷ Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

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During the drive, Mitch accidentally causes a stampede which destroys the camp. While searching for stray cows, Mitch discovers Curly has a kind nature beneath his gruff exterior. Curly encourages Mitch to discover the "one thing" in his life that is most important to him. Along the way, Mitch helps deliver a calf from a dying cow. Mitch names the calf Norman. Shortly afterwards, Curly suffers a fatal heart attack, leaving the cattle drive under Jeff and TRs control. Camp cook, Cookie, gets drunk and accidentally destroys the food supply, breaking his leg in the process. After the Jessups leave to take Cookie to a nearby town, Jeff and TR become drunk. A fight ensues when they threaten to kill Norman and assault Mitch. Phil and Ed intervene, and Phil holds Jeff at gunpoint, which unleashes his pent-up emotions. Soon after, Jeff and TR abandon the group. Bonnie and the Shalowitzes continue to the Colorado ranch, while Ed and Phil remain behind to finish the drive. Mitch also leaves but soon returns to rejoin his friends.

After braving a heavy storm, they drive the herd to Colorado. When Norman nearly drowns as the herd crosses a river, Mitch heroically saves him. Both are swept down current, but Phil and Ed rescue them, and they safely reach the Colorado ranch. When Stone offers to reimburse everyone's fee, the Jessups prefer going on a future cattle drive. However, Clay reveals that he is selling the herd to a meatpacking company. Mitch, Phil, and Ed initially believe they saved the cattle for nothing but decided to use their experience to help re-evaluate their lives.

The men return to New York City. Mitch, a happier man, reunites with Barbara and their two children; he has also brought Norman, the calf, home as a pet. Phil learned that his employee was never pregnant, and he and Bonnie are in a relationship. Ed intends to start a family with his wife. Mitch is ready to restart his life with a new vision.

Cast

- **Billy Crystal** as Mitch Robbins
- **Daniel Stern** as Phil Berquist
- **Bruno Kirby** as Ed Furillo
- **Patricia Wettig** as Barbara Robbins
- **Helen Slater** as Bonnie Rayburn
- **Jack Palance** as Curly Washburn
- **Noble Willingham** as Clay Stone
- **Tracey Walter** as Cookie
- **Jeffrey Tambor** as Lou
- **Josh Mostel** as Barry Shalowitz
- **David Paymer** as Ira Shalowitz
- **Bill Henderson** as Dr Ben Jessup
- **Phill Lewis** as Dr Steve Jessup
- **Kyle Secor** as Jeff
- **Dean Hall** as TR.
- **Karla Tamburrelli** as Arlene Berquist
- **Yardley Smith** as Nancy
- **Robert Costanzo** as Sal Morelli
- **Walker Brandt** as Kim Furillo
- **Molly McClure** as Millie Stone
- **Jane Alden** as Mrs Green
- **Lindsay Crystal** as Holly Robbins
- **Jake Gyllenhaal** as Danny Robbins
- **Danielle Harris** as Classroom Student
- **Eddie Palmer** as Classroom Student
- **Howard Honig** as Skycap Guy
- **Fred Maio** as Doctor
- **Jayne Meadows** as The Voice of Mitch's Mother
- **Alan Charof** as The Voice of Mitch's Father

Production

The film's plot, which consists of inexperienced cowboys battling villains as they press on with their cattle drive after the death of their leader, was conceived to be similar to **John Wayne's** *The Cowboys*, although that was a Western drama as opposed to a comedy.

In his 2013 memoir, *Still Foolin' Em*, Billy Crystal writes of how the film's casting came about. "Palance," he said, "was the first choice from the beginning but had a commitment to make another film." He wrote later that he contacted **Charles Bronson** about the part, only to be rudely rebuffed because the character dies. Palance got out of his other obligation to join the cast. **Rick Moranis**, originally cast as Phil, had to leave the production due to his wife's illness. **Daniel Stern** was a late replacement in the role. The film was also the debut of actor **Jake Gyllenhaal**.

Box Office

The budget was estimated at \$27 million. Gross worldwide receipts totalled \$179 million.⁸

⁸ Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101587/>

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The Court Jester (1955)



*The Court Jester*⁹ is a 1955 musical-comedy, medieval romance, costume-drama film. The film's stars included **Danny Kaye**, **Glynis Johns**, **Basil Rathbone**, **Angela Lansbury** and **Cecil Parker**. The film was written, produced, and directed by **Melvin Frank** and **Norman Panama** for **Paramount Pictures**. It was released in **Technicolor** and the **VistaVision** widescreen format.

The film centres on Hubert Hawkins, a carnival entertainer working with the Black Fox's band of rebels (a parody of Robin Hood and his Merry Men) to guard the true infant King of Medieval England from a usurper. A strange chance causes Hawkins to become a spy in the guise of a court jester in the usurping King's castle, where many people wish to make use of the Jester for their own villainous ends. The film contains three songs (all sung by Kaye), makes heavy use of slapstick comedy and quick-witted wordplay, and is best remembered for the tongue twister "*The pellet with the poison's in the vessel with the pestle; the chalice from the palace has the brew that is true!*" Although the film was not financially successful upon release (taking only \$2 million against a budget of \$4 million), it has since grown to be a beloved classic, earning high scores on **Rotten Tomatoes**. In 2004, *The Court Jester* was included in the annual selection of 25 motion pictures added to the **National Film Registry** of the **Library of Congress**, being deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" and recommended for preservation.

Picture Credit: Attribution – © "Copyright 1955 Paramount Pictures Corporation", Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

File URL: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d1/The_Court_Jester_%281955_poster%29.jpg

Plot

King Roderick the Tyrant, having sent Lord Ravenhurst to slaughter the Royal Family of England, usurps the throne. The Black Fox and his band of rebels rescue the true King, an infant with the royal "purple pimperl" birthmark on his backside. They harass Roderick and his men while guarding the baby. Lords Brockhurst, Finsdale, and Pertwee convince the King to seek an alliance with Sir Griswold of MacElwain, by offering him Roderick's daughter Gwendolyn in marriage. Gwendolyn objects, for the castle witch Griselda foretold a more gallant lover.

Hubert Hawkins, the Black Fox's minstrel, brings a troupe of acrobat-midgets from the carnival to replace him so he can fight, but the Black Fox refuses. The King's men find their hideout, so Hawkins and another rebel, Maid Jean, are ordered to disguise themselves as wine merchants and take the baby to safety. They meet the King's newly hired jester, Giacomo, on the road. Jean knocks him out and tells Hawkins to steal his identity. Hawkins heads for the castle, and Jean travels on alone but is captured by the King's men, who were ordered to bring the fairest wenches to the King's court. The Lord Ravenhurst tells a friend that Giacomo is actually an assassin whom he hired to kill Brockhurst, Finsdale, and Pertwee, to prevent the alliance. Gwendolyn decides to kill Griselda for lying to her until Griselda promises Giacomo as her prophesied lover. Unaware of both these things, Hawkins enters the castle and tries to contact a rebel confederate. However, Ravenhurst unwittingly appears at his whistle signal, so Hawkins allies himself with him instead.

Before his arrival, Fergus the Hostler, the true confederate, met up with Jean and hid the baby in a basket. Jean sneaks into the palace and steals a key to a secret passage from King Roderick's chambers. Hawkins is put under a hypnotic spell by Griselda, and in that state woos the princess, receives his orders to kill the three lords from Ravenhurst, and gets the key from Jean, but loses it back to the King. Hawkins forgets all this once the spell is gone. Fergus gives him the basket with the baby, but before he can get it to safety, Hawkins is called before the King. He manages to distract the King and crowd from noticing the basket with a well-received performance, and Jean rescues the basket. Griselda, meanwhile, poisons the three lords' cups to prevent the alliance.

⁹ Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

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Ravenhurst believes Hawkins killed them. Griswold arrives, but Gwendolyn declares her love for "Giacomo", and Hawkins is arrested and jailed. Ravenhurst learns that Giacomo never arrived and concludes that Hawkins, having 'sabotaged' the alliance, must be the Black Fox. He convinces Roderick to rush Hawkins through the trials to become a knight so he can duel Griswold, ostensibly so Griswold can kill the Jester but really so the Black Fox can eliminate Griswold.

Jean steals back the key, and Fergus sends it by pigeon to the real Black Fox but is caught and tortured to death by Ravenhurst's men. At the tournament, Griselda poisons one of the drinks and tells Hawkins which it is. One of Griswold's men overhears and warns Griswold, and he and Hawkins both struggle to remember which of the glasses is poisoned (the famous "Vessel with the Pestle" routine) and end up not drinking the toast. Hawkins defeats Griswold in the duel through sheer luck but spares his life and sends him away.

Ravenhurst finds the baby and exposes Hawkins as a traitor. However, the real Black Fox sends the midgets through the secret passage, and they rescue Hawkins, Jean, and the baby. Jean clubs the door guard and lets the Black Fox's army into the castle. Threatened by Gwendolyn, Griselda hypnotises Hawkins to become a swordmaster and he duels Ravenhurst, though the spell is accidentally switched on and off several times. Finally, Hawkins and Jean launch Ravenhurst from a catapult into the sea. Griswold returns with his army, ready to kill the rebels, but Hawkins shows him the purple pimpernel birthmark on the baby. Griswold kneels to the baby, as does everyone else, including Roderick. Hawkins leads everybody in song as the film ends.

Cast (as listed in order of appearance in opening credits):

- **Danny Kaye** as Hubert Hawkins, a minstrel who steals Giacomo the Jester's identity
- **Glynis Johns** as Maid Jean, a rebel captain and Hawkins' love interest
- **Basil Rathbone**¹⁰ as Lord Ravenhurst, the King's closest adviser
- **Angela Lansbury** as Gwendolyn, Princess of England
- **Cecil Parker** as Roderick, faux King of England and father of Gwendolyn
- **Mildred Natwick** as Griselda, a witch and adviser to Gwendolyn
- **Robert Middleton** as Sir Griswold of MacElwain, Gwendolyn's betrothed
- **Michael Pate** as Sir Locksley, Ravenhurst's lackey and ally
- **Herbert Rudley** as the Captain of the Guard, one of Ravenhurst's lackeys
- **Noel Drayton** as Fergus the Hostler, a spy of the Black Fox in Roderick's castle
- **John Carradine** as Giacomo, an Italian jester and assassin, hired by Ravenhurst
- **Edward Ashley** as the Black Fox, a rebel leader
- **Alan Napier** as Lord Brockhurst, adviser to Roderick
- **Lewis Martin** as Lord Finsdale, adviser to Roderick
- **Patrick Aherne** as Lord Pertwee, adviser to Roderick
- **Richard Kean** as Archbishop
- **Hermine's Midgets** as Hubert Hawkins' acrobatic troupe
- **The American Legion Zouaves** (of Richard F. Smith, Post No. 29, **Jackson, Michigan**) as the Marching Knights

Production (as listed in order of appearance in opening credits):

- **Hal Pereira**—art direction
- **Roland Anderson**—art direction
- **Tom McAdo**—editor
- **John P. Fulton**, (ASC)—special photography effects
- **Irmin Roberts**, (ASC)—special photography effects
- **Farciot Edouart**, (A.S.C.)—process photography
- **Sam Comer**—set decoration
- **Arthur Krams**—set decoration
- **Edith Head**—costumes
- **Yvonne Wood**—costumes
- **John Coonan**—assistant director
- **D.R.O. Hatswell**—technical advisor
- **Wally Westmore**—makeup supervision
- **Harry Lindgren**—sound recording
- **John Cope**—sound recording
- **Victor Schoen**—music scoring and conducting
- **Hal C. Kern**—assistant to producers
- **James Starbuck**—choreographer
- **Sylvia Fine**—lyrics
- **Sammy Cahn**—music
- **Norman Panama**—co-writer, co-producer and co-director
- **Melvin Frank**—co-writer, co-producer and co-director

¹⁰ Interestingly, Rathbone's name appears three times in opening credits (third, sixth and nineteenth); everyone else's only once.

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Critical Reception

Made for a cost of \$4 million in the fall of 1955, *The Court Jester* was the most expensive comedy film produced up to that time. The motion picture bombed at the box office upon its release, bringing in only \$2.2 million in receipts the following winter and spring of 1956. However, since then it has become a classic and a television matinee favourite.

Awards and Honours

In 1957, Danny Kaye received a **Golden Globe** nomination for **Best Motion Picture Actor – Comedy/Musical**, and in 2000, the **American Film Institute** placed the film on its **100 Years...100 Laughs** list, where it was ranked number 98. In 2004, the United States **National Film Registry** elected to preserve *The Court Jester* for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant."

Memorable Words¹¹

The film's most famous sequence is the pre-joust toast (between Hawkins and Sir Griswold), before which Griselda warns Hawkins about the location of poison in the toast vessel, with the famous tongue-twisting "Vessel with the Pestle" dialogue:

Hawkins: I've got it! I've got it! The pellet with the poison's in the vessel with the pestle; the chalice from the palace has the brew that is true! Right?

Griselda: Right. But there's been a change: they broke the chalice from the palace!

Hawkins: They 'broke' the chalice from the palace?

Griselda: And replaced it with a flagon.

Hawkins: A flagon...?

Griselda: With the figure of a dragon.

Hawkins: Flagon with a dragon.

Griselda: Right.

Hawkins: But did you put the pellet with the poison in the vessel with the pestle?

Griselda: No! The pellet with the poison's in the flagon with the dragon! The vessel with the pestle has the brew that is true!

Hawkins: The pellet with the poison's in the flagon with the dragon; the vessel with the pestle has the brew that is true.

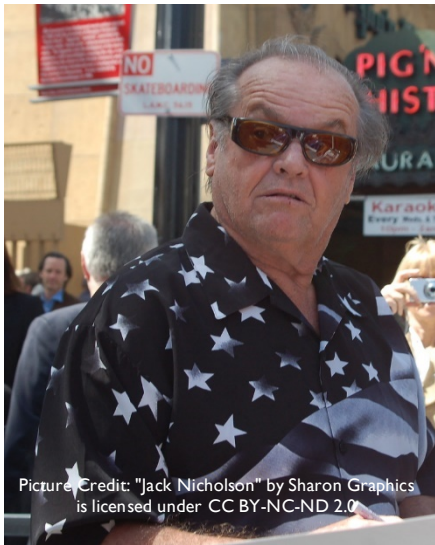
Griselda: Just remember that.

¹¹ See the full text on IMDB, at: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0049096/quotes/?ref=tt_trv_qu

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As Good as It Gets (1997)



*As Good as It Gets*¹² is a 1997 American romantic comedy-drama film directed by **James L. Brooks**, who co-wrote it with **Mark Andrus**. The film stars **Jack Nicholson**, a novelist with issues, **Helen Hunt** as a single mother with a chronically ill son, and **Greg Kinnear** as an artist who is gay. Nicholson and Hunt won the **Academy Award for Best Actor** and **Best Actress**, respectively, making *As Good as It Gets* the most recent film to win both of the lead acting awards and the first since 1991's *The Silence of the Lambs*. It was also nominated for **Best Picture** but ultimately lost to *Titanic*. It is ranked 140th on *Empire* magazine's "The 500 Greatest Movies of All Time" list.



Plot

Misanthropic New York City best-selling romance novelist Melvin Udall has **obsessive-compulsive disorder**; he uses soap bars to wash his hands only once, dislikes touching pets, avoids stepping on sidewalk cracks while walking through the city, and eats his breakfast at the same table in the same restaurant. He takes an interest in his waitress, Carol Connelly, the only server at the restaurant who can tolerate his odd and often uncouth behaviour.

One day, Melvin's apartment neighbour, gay artist Simon Bishop, is assaulted and nearly killed during a robbery. Simon's agent, Frank Sachs, intimidates Melvin into caring for Simon's dog, a **Griffon Bruxellois**, called Verdell, while Simon is hospitalised. Although at first he does not enjoy caring for the dog, Melvin becomes emotionally attached to it, receiving more attention from Carol. When Simon is released from the hospital, Melvin cannot cope emotionally with returning the dog. Melvin's life is further altered when Carol decides to work closer to her home in Brooklyn to care for her acutely asthmatic son Spencer. Unable to adjust to a different waitress, Melvin arranges via his publisher (whose husband is a doctor) to pay for her son's considerable medical expenses as long as Carol agrees to return to work. She is overwhelmed but accepts, albeit doubting the motives for his generosity.

Meanwhile, Simon's assault and rehabilitation, coupled with Verdell's preference for Melvin, causes Simon to lose his creative muse and fall into a depression. He is approaching bankruptcy due to medical bills without having health insurance. Frank persuades him to go to Baltimore to ask his estranged parents for money. Because Frank is too busy to take the injured Simon to Baltimore himself, Melvin reluctantly agrees to do so; Frank lends Melvin the use of his Saab 900 convertible for the trip. Melvin invites Carol to accompany them on the journey to lessen the awkwardness. She reluctantly accepts, and relationships among the three develop.

Once in Baltimore, Carol persuades Melvin to take her out for dinner. Melvin's comments during the dinner greatly flatter—and subsequently upset—Carol, and she abruptly leaves. Upon seeing her, frustrated, Simon begins to sketch her, semi-nude, in his hotel room, which rekindles his creativity, and he once more feels a desire to paint. He briefly reconnects with his parents but can tell them that he will be fine.

After returning to New York, Carol tells Melvin that she does not want him in her life anymore but later regrets her statement and calls to apologise. The relationship between Melvin and Carol remains complicated until Simon (whom Melvin has allowed to move in with him, as he had to sell his apartment) persuades Melvin to declare his love for her. Melvin goes to see Carol, who hesitantly agrees to try and establish a relationship with him. The film ends with Melvin and Carol walking together. As he opens the door at an early morning pastry shop for Carol, he realises that he has stepped on a crack in the pavement but does not seem to mind.

¹² Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

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Cast

- Jack Nicholson as Melvin Udall
- Helen Hunt as Carol Connelly
- Greg Kinnear as Simon Bishop
- Cuba Gooding Jr. as Frank Sachs
- Skeet Ulrich as Vincent Lopiano
- Shirley Knight as Beverly Connelly
- Jesse James as Spencer "Spence" Connelly
- Yearley Smith as Jackie Simpson
- Lupe Ontiveros as Nora Manning
- Bibi Osterwald as Neighbour Woman
- Harold Ramis as Dr Martin Bettes
- Lawrence Kasdan as Dr Green
- Julie Benz as Receptionist
- Shane Black as Brian, Cafe 24 manager
- Leslie Stefanson as Cafe 24 Waitress
- Tom McGowan as Maitre D'
- Brian Doyle-Murray as Handyman
- Jamie Kennedy as Street Hustler
- Missi Pyle as Cafe 24 Waitress
- Wood Harris as Cafe 24 Busboy
- Maya Rudolph as Policewoman

Production

In 1996, James L. Brooks flew Geoffrey Rush from Sydney to Los Angeles to audition for the part of Simon Bishop and offered him the role, but Rush declined it. Betty White was offered a role in the film, but she declined. **Owen Wilson** served as associate producer, one of his first jobs in Hollywood. Nicholson and Brooks clashed on set regarding Nicholson's performance of Melvin, leading to a production halt for the two to find the correct tone for the character. The paintings were created for the film by New York artist Billy Sullivan.

Box office

The film was released in theatres on Christmas Day 1997 and was a box office hit, opening at number three at the box office (behind *Titanic* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*) with \$12.6 million and eventually earning over \$148 million domestically and \$314 million worldwide, on a \$50 million budget. It is Jack Nicholson's second highest-earning film, behind *Batman*.

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The Return of the Pink Panther (1975)

Picture Credit: Screen Clip from Video
Trailer at: <https://youtu.be/DaHG1x2Bg84>



*The Return of the Pink Panther*¹³ is a 1975 comedy film and the fourth film in *The Pink Panther* series. The film stars **Peter Sellers**, returning to the role of **Inspector Clouseau**, for the first time since *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), after having declined to reprise the role in *Inspector Clouseau* (1968). The film was a commercial hit and revived the previously dormant series and Peter Sellers' career with it.

Herbert Lom reprises his role as Chief Inspector **Charles Dreyfus** from *A Shot in the Dark*; he remained a regular after that. The character of Sir Charles Litton, the notorious Phantom, was played by **Christopher Plummer** rather than **David Niven**, who had played the part in *The Pink Panther* (1963) and was unavailable. The Pink Panther diamond once again plays a central role in the plot.

Plot

In the fictional country of Lugash, a mysterious thief seizes the Pink Panther diamond and leaves a white glove embroidered with a gold "P". With its national treasure once again missing, the Shah of Lugash requests the help of Inspector Clouseau (**Peter Sellers**) of the *Sûreté*, as Clouseau had recovered the diamond the last time it was stolen (in *The Pink Panther*). Clouseau has been temporarily demoted to beat cop by his boss, Chief Inspector Charles Dreyfus (**Herbert Lom**), who despises him to the point of obsession, but the French government forces Dreyfus to reinstate him. Clouseau joyously receives the news and duly departs for Lugash, but not before fending off a surprise attack from his servant Cato (**Burt Kwouk**), who had been ordered to do so to keep the Inspector on his toes.

Upon examining the crime scene in the national museum — in which, due to his habitual clumsiness, he wrecks several priceless antiquities — Clouseau concludes that the glove implicates Sir Charles Litton (**Christopher Plummer**), alias "the notorious Phantom," as the thief. After several catastrophic failures to stake out Litton Manor in Nice, Clouseau believes a mysterious assassin is attempting to kill him. He follows Sir Charles' wife, Lady Claudine Litton (**Catherine Schell**), to the Gstaad Palace hotel in Switzerland to find clues to her husband's whereabouts but, predictably, bungles the investigation.

Meanwhile, Sir Charles is teased about the theft by his wife and realises he has been framed. Arriving in Lugash to clear his name, Sir Charles barely avoids being murdered and sent to the Lugash secret police by his associate known as the "Fat Man" (**Eric Pohlmann**), who explains that with the leading suspect dead, the secret police will no longer have an excuse to continue purging their political enemies. Escaping to his suite, Litton finds secret police Colonel Sharki (**Peter Arne**) waiting for him, who implies the Fat Man's understanding is correct but reminds him the diamond must be recovered eventually. Sir Charles pretends to cooperate but cannot hide his reaction when he recognises a face on the museum's security footage. He avoids another plot by the Fat Man and his duplicitous underling Pepi (**Graham Stark**) and escapes from Lugash, secretly pursued by Sharki, who believes Sir Charles will lead him to the diamond.

In Gstaad, Clouseau, still tailing Lady Claudine, is suddenly ordered by Dreyfus over the telephone to arrest her in her hotel room. However, when Clouseau calls back to clarify the order, he is told that Dreyfus is on vacation. Sir Charles, who in the meantime has chartered a private flight out of Lugash, arrives at the hotel and is first to confront his wife. Lady Claudine admits she stole the jewel to spark excitement in their lives. Colonel Sharki shows up, but Inspector Clouseau barges in - just as the Colonel prepares to kill them both. Sir Charles explains things to Clouseau, and Sharki is about to kill the three of them.

¹³ Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

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However, Dreyfus has followed Clouseau and is outside the hotel room with a rifle — Dreyfus is, in fact, the "mysterious assassin" who has been trying to kill Clouseau all this time — and just as Dreyfus shoots at Clouseau, the Inspector ducks to check if his fly is undone, and the shot kills Sharki instead. The other three take cover, while Dreyfus, insanely enraged by his latest failure to kill Clouseau, goes berserk until he is arrested.

For once again recovering the Pink Panther, Clouseau is promoted to Chief Inspector, while Sir Charles resumes his career as a jewel thief. At a Japanese restaurant in the epilogue, Cato unexpectedly attacks Clouseau again and triggers a massive brawl, destroying the premises. Dreyfus is committed to a lunatic asylum for his actions, where he is straitjacketed inside a padded cell and vows revenge on Clouseau. The film ends when the Pink Panther (in cartoon form) enters Dreyfus' cell and films him writing "The End" on the wall.

Cast

- Peter Sellers as Inspector Jacques Clouseau
- Christopher Plummer as Sir Charles Litton
- Catherine Schell as Lady Claudine Litton
- Herbert Lom as Chief Inspector Charles Dreyfus
- Burt Kwouk as Cato Fong
- Peter Arne as Colonel Sharki
- Peter Jeffrey as General Wadafi
- Grégoire Aslan as Chief of Lugash Police
- David Lodge as Mac
- Graham Stark as Pepi
- Eric Pohlmann as The Fat Man
- André Maranne as François
- Victor Spinetti as Hotel Concierge
- John Bluthal as Blind Beggar
- Mike Grady as Bell Boy
- Peter Jones as Psychiatrist

Box Office

The film grossed \$41.8 million in the United States and Canada and \$75 million worldwide.



Picture Credit: "inspector" by meophamman is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

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Genevieve (1953)



Picture Credit: "1904 Darracq 'Genevieve'" by Loco Steve is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

*Genevieve*¹⁴ is a 1953 British comedy film produced and directed by **Henry Cornelius** and written by **William Rose**. It stars **John Gregson**, **Dinah Sheridan**, **Kenneth More** and **Kay Kendall** as two couples comedically involved in a **veteran automobile** rally.

Plot

Two **veteran cars** and their crews participate in the annual **London to Brighton Veteran Car Run**. Alan McKim (John Gregson), a young barrister, and his wife, Wendy (Dinah Sheridan), drive *Genevieve*, a 1904 **Darracq** (see picture above). Their friend Ambrose Claverhouse (Kenneth More), a brash advertising salesman, his latest girlfriend, fashion model Rosalind Peters (Kay Kendall), and her pet St. Bernard ride in a 1905 **Spyker**.

The journey to Brighton goes well for Claverhouse, but several breakdowns complicate the McKims' trip, and they arrive very late. As Alan cancelled their accommodation in their usual plush hotel during a fit of anger, they are forced to spend the night in a dingy, run-down hotel (with a cameo performance by **Joyce Grenfell** as the proprietress), leaving Wendy feeling less than pleased.

They finally join Ambrose and Rosalind for after-dinner drinks, but Rosalind gets very drunk and insists on playing the trumpet with the house band. To the surprise of all, she performs a hot jazz solo before falling fast asleep moments later, to Wendy's great amusement. (Kendall mimes the performance of "Genevieve" to a rendition by jazz trumpeter **Kenny Baker**.)

Alan and Wendy argue over Ambrose's supposed romantic attentions to her, and Alan goes off to the garage to sulk. Whilst he works on his car in the middle of the night, Ambrose turns up. Angry words are exchanged, and Alan impulsively bets the other man £100 that he can beat Ambrose back to London, despite racing not being allowed by the Club. Ambrose accepts the bet—"First over Westminster Bridge."

¹⁴ Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

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The following morning, despite Rosalind's massive hangover and Wendy's determined disapproval of the whole business, the two crews race back to London. Each driver is determined that his car is the better, come what may, and they resort to various cheating forms. Ambrose sabotages Alan's engine, and Alan causes Ambrose to be stopped by the police.

Finally, on the outskirts of London (West Drayton), both cars are stopped by traffic police and the four contestants are publicly warned after Alan and Ambrose almost come to blows. At Wendy's insistence, they decide to call off the bet and have a party instead. But whilst waiting for the pub to open, words are exchanged, and the wager is on again.

The two cars race neck-and-neck through the southern suburbs of London. But with only a few yards to go, Genevieve breaks down. As Ambrose's car is about to overtake it, its tyres become stuck in tramlines (London's tram network had closed in 1952, but many of the tracks were still in evidence when the film was made that same year), and it drives off in another direction. The brakes on Genevieve fail, and the car rolls a few yards onto Westminster Bridge, thus winning the bet.

Cast

- **John Gregson** as Alan McKim
- **Dinah Sheridan** as Wendy McKim
- **Kenneth More** as Ambrose Claverhouse
- **Kay Kendall** as Rosalind Peters
- **Geoffrey Keen** as First traffic policeman
- **Reginald Beckwith** as J.C. Callahan
- **Arthur Wontner** as Elderly Gentleman
- **Joyce Grenfell** as Hotel proprietress
- **Leslie Mitchell** as Himself – Newsreel Commentator
- **Michael Balfour** as Trumpeter (uncredited)
- Stanley Escane as Newsreel cameraman (uncredited)
- **Fred Griffiths** as Ice Cream Seller (uncredited)
- **Charles Lamb** as Publican (uncredited)
- **Arthur Lovegrove** as Hotel Doorman (uncredited)
- **Edward Malin** as Spectator (uncredited)
- **Edie Martin** as Guest at Hotel (uncredited)
- **Michael Medwin** as Father-to-be (uncredited)
- **Harold Siddons** as Second traffic policeman (uncredited)
- Patrick Westwood as a Motor mechanic (uncredited)

Production

Henry Cornelius had made *Passport to Pimlico* for Ealing Studios but had left the studio to go independent. He approached **Michael Balcon** to make *Genevieve* for Ealing. However, given that Cornelius' returning would disrupt the studio's production schedule and that he had not won any friends at Ealing by leaving, Balcon turned the film down, leaving Cornelius to have his film made for **Rank Studios**.

At first, **Earl St John** was not enthusiastic about making the film but agreed to take it to the Rank Board if the budget could be kept to £115,000. J. Arthur Rank agreed to provide 70% of the finance if Cornelius could source the rest elsewhere; the director obtained the money from the National Film Finance Corporation.

The original choices for the male leads were **Guy Middleton** and **Dirk Bogarde**; they turned the film down, and their roles were given to Kenneth More and John Gregson, respectively. Dinah Sheridan says that the studio wanted **Claire Bloom** to play her part.

Kenneth More was appearing in the enormously successful production of *The Deep Blue Sea* when **Henry Cornelius** approached him to play the part of Ambrose. More said Cornelius never saw him in the play but cast him based on his work in an earlier film, *The Galloping Major*. More's fee was around £4,000. Filming took place between October 1952 and February 1953. More recalled: "the shooting of the picture was hell. Everything went wrong, even the weather." More said, because of Cornelius' perfectionism, the film went over budget by £20,000.

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The themes of the musical score were composed and performed by **Larry Adler** and harmonised and orchestrated by composer **Graham Whettam** who wrote the orchestral scores incorporating Larry Adler's tunes. Dance numbers were added by **Eric Rogers**.

The comedic tone of *Genevieve* was established by the following disclaimer at the end of the opening credits: For their patient co-operation, the makers of this film express their thanks to the officers and members of the **Veteran Car Club of Great Britain**. Any resemblance between the department of our characters and any club members is emphatically denied—by the Club. This was meant to underscore the fact that the actual event portrayed in the film is not a race.

Cars

The script for *Genevieve* originally called for the rivals to be driving British cars, Alan McKim a **Wolseley** or **Humber**, and Ambrose Claverhouse a **Lanchester**. No owners of such cars were willing to lend them for filming, and eventually, Norman Reeves loaned his **Darracq** and Frank Reese his **Spyker**. The Darracq was originally named *Annie* but was permanently renamed *Genevieve* after the film's success.

Genevieve returned from a 34-year visit to Australia in 1992, and takes part in the London-Brighton Run every year. In July 2002, *Genevieve* and another *Spyker* participated in a 50th-anniversary rally, touring the filming locations. Both *Genevieve* and Ambrose Claverhouse's *Spyker* were, as of 2012, on display at the **Louwman Museum** in **The Hague**.

Reception

Genevieve was critically reviewed by **Bosley Crowther** for *The New York Times*, giving the film a very positive appraisal. "On the strength of the current mania that some restless people have for automobiles of ancient vintage—what are fondly called "veteran cars"—a British producer-director, Henry Cornelius, has made a film that may cautiously be recommended as one of the funniest farce comedies in years."

Box Office

Genevieve was the second-most popular film at the British box office in 1953. In the US, it earned Rank rentals of \$560,000.¹⁵ (Another account said \$450,000.¹⁶) According to the **National Film Finance Corporation**, the film made a comfortable profit.¹⁷ *Genevieve* initiated a cycle of other comedies from the Rank Organisation.

It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World

According to the commentary on the Criterion edition of *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, nearly a decade later, Rose used *Genevieve* as the basis for the former, another automobile comedy, but on a larger scale and set in Scotland. He sent an outline to **Stanley Kramer** who, as luck would have it, was ready to make a comedy after a string of intense dramas which had been critical successes but hadn't made money. Kramer agreed to buy the project provided they would change the setting to America. Rose agreed, and he and his wife Tania wrote the screenplay. Released in 1963, the film became the biggest box-office hit of Rose's career.

¹⁵ Source: "2d Thoughts on Rank's N.Y. Times Ad". *Variety*. 18 January 1956. p. 5. Retrieved 21 July 2019 – via *Archive.org*.

¹⁶ Source: "Ranks NY Times Ad Ups Eyebrows". *Variety*. 11 January 1956. p. 10.

¹⁷ Source: "U.S. money behind 30% of British films: Problems for the Board of Trade." *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 May 1956, p. 7.

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The General (1926)



*The General*¹⁸ is a 1926 American silent comedy film released by **United Artists**. It was inspired by the **Great Locomotive Chase**, a true story of an event during the **American Civil War**. The story was adapted from the 1889 memoir *The Great Locomotive Chase* by **William Pittenger**. The film stars **Buster Keaton**, who co-directed it with **Clyde Bruckman**.

When it was released, *The General*, an action-adventure-comedy made toward the end of the **silent era**, was not well received by critics and audiences, resulting in mediocre box office returns (about half a million dollars domestically and approximately \$1 million worldwide). Because of its then-huge budget (\$750,000 supplied by Metro chief **Joseph Schenck**) and failure to turn a significant profit, Keaton lost his independence as a filmmaker and was forced into a restrictive deal with **MGM**.

In 1954, the film entered the public domain in the United States because its claimant did not renew its copyright registration in the 28th year after publication. *Since then*, *The General* has been re-evaluated and is often ranked among the most significant American films ever made. In 1989, it was selected by the **Library of Congress** to be included in the first class of films for preservation in the United States **National Film Registry** for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".

Picture Credit: Poster for *The General*, a 1926 American silent comedy film released by United Artists. This work is in the **public domain** in the United States because it was **published** in the United States between 1926 and 1977, inclusive, without a **copyright notice**.
URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_general_movie_poster.jpg

Plot

Western & Atlantic Railroad train engineer Johnnie Gray is in Marietta, Georgia, to see the two loves of his life—his fiancée Annabelle Lee and his locomotive, called *The General* when the **American Civil War** breaks out. He hurries to be first in line to enlist in the **Confederate Army** but is rejected because he is too important in his present job but is not told that reason. On leaving, he runs into Annabelle's father and brother, who beckon him to join them in line, but he walks away, giving them the impression that he does not want to enlist. Annabelle informs Johnnie that she will not speak to him again until he is in uniform.

A year passes, and Annabelle receives word that her father has been wounded. She travels north to see him taking the **W&ARR**¹⁹ with *The General* pulling the train. When it makes a stop, the passengers detrain for a quick meal. As previously planned, **Union** spies led by Captain Anderson use the opportunity to steal the train. Anderson's objective is to burn all the railroad bridges he passes, thus preventing reinforcement and resupply of the Confederate army. Annabelle becomes an inadvertent prisoner of the raiders.

Johnnie gives chase, first on foot, then by handcar²⁰ and boneshaker bicycle²¹, before reaching the station at Kingston, where he alerts the army detachment. The men board another train to give chase, with Johnnie manning the locomotive called the **Texas**. Unfortunately, the flatcars are not hooked up to the engine, and the troops are left behind. When Johnnie realises he is alone, it is too late for him to turn back.

¹⁸ Excerpted and Adapted from Wikipedia, [HERE](#).

¹⁹ The Western and Atlantic Railroad.

²⁰ A handcar (also known as a pump trolley, pump car, jigger, Kalamazoo, velocipede, or draisine) is a railroad car powered by its passengers, or by people pushing the car from behind. It is mostly used as a **maintenance of way** or **mining** car, but it was also used for passenger service in some cases. A typical design consists of an arm, called the walking beam, that pivots, seesaw-like, on a base, which the passengers alternately push down and pull up to move the car.

²¹ The bicycle was called a *boneshaker* because of its extremely uncomfortable ride, caused by the stiff wrought-iron frame and wooden wheels surrounded by tires made of iron.

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The Union agents try various methods to shake their pursuer, including disconnecting their trailing car and dropping railroad ties on the tracks. As the chase continues northward, the Confederate **Army of Tennessee** is ordered to retreat, and the Northern army advances in its wake. Johnnie finally notices Union soldiers surround him, and the hijackers see that Johnnie is alone. Johnnie stops the *Texas* and runs into the forest to hide.

At nightfall, Johnnie stumbles upon the Northern encampment. Hungry, he climbs through a window to steal some food but hides underneath the table when some officers enter. He overhears their plan for a surprise attack and that the Rock River Bridge is essential for their supporting supply trains. He then sees Annabelle brought in; she is taken to a room under guard while they decide what to do with her. Johnnie manages to knock out both guards and free Annabelle. They escape into the rainy woods.

The next day, Johnnie and Annabelle find themselves near a railway station, where Union soldiers and equipment are being organised for the attack. Seeing *The General*, Johnnie devises a plan to warn the South. After sneaking Annabelle onto a boxcar, Johnnie steals his engine back. Two Union trains, including the *Texas*, set out after the pair, while the Union attack is immediately launched. In a reversal of the first chase, Johnnie now has to fend off his pursuers. Finally, he starts a fire behind *The General* in the centre of the Rock River Bridge to cut off the Union's important supply line.

Reaching Confederate lines, Johnnie warns the commander of the impending attack, and their forces rush to defend the bridge. Meanwhile, Annabelle is reunited with her convalescing father. The pursuing *Texas* drives onto the burning bridge, which collapses. When Union soldiers try to ford the river, Confederate fire drives them back. Afterwards, Johnnie returns to his locomotive to find the Union officer he had knocked out in escaping earlier has now regained consciousness. He takes the officer prisoner and is spotted by the general, leaving the locomotive with him. As a reward for his bravery, he is commissioned as a lieutenant and given the captured officer's sword.

Returning to *the General* with Annabelle, he tries to kiss his girl but has to return the salutes of troops walking past. Johnnie finally uses his left hand to embrace Annabelle while using his right to salute the passing soldiers.



Watch it now

Now in the public domain, the film is available online, and it's copyright-free, **HERE**. (see screen clip, left)

Sources and Further Information

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_Harry_Met_Sally
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