

DAILY VARIETY

Posted: Mon., Sep. 17, 2007, 2:59pm PT

Moving McAllister

A First Independent Pictures release in association with Revel Entertainment of a Camera 40 production. Produced by Jason Faller, Ben Gourley, Kynan Griffin. Executive producers, T.R. Gourley, Maclain Nelson. Directed by Andrew Black. Screenplay, Ben Gourley.

Rick Robinson - Ben Gourley
Michelle McAllister - Mila Kunis
Orlick "Orlie" Prescott Hope - Jon Heder
Maxwell McAllister - Rutger Hauer

By [PETER DEBRUGE](#)

With his bar exam only days away, an overeager law intern agrees to drive his boss' niece cross-country in "Moving McAllister," the sort of meandering road-trip comedy in which the characters must act surprised by zany detours and see coming from miles away. Writer-star Ben Gourley packs this excursion with enough contrived quirkiness and latent angst to win over the college crowd, but adds nothing particularly insightful about his generation. Theatrical prospects look slim, although pic could conceivably serve to put Gourley and director Andrew Black on Hollywood's map.

"Moving McAllister" hails from the same Brigham Young U. film school posse that produced "Napoleon Dynamite," which explains how Gourley's college chum Jon Heder came to accept his scene-stealing role as a hitchhiker who's too friendly by half.

Gourley casts himself as Rick Robinson, a brown-noser with a heart of gold who sees this assignment as a chance to get in good with his firm's top shark, Maxwell McAllister (Rutger Hauer), even if it means paying for the moving van out of his own pocket.

Like the yellow Volkswagen bus in "Little Miss Sunshine," Rick's rusty rental van (complete with faded Paradise palm-tree mural) proves the pic's most memorable character, earning a laugh against nearly any backdrop. The endearing eyesore chugs from Miami to Malibu, reliably breaking down every other state or so to

give its passengers an opportunity to develop their chemistry -- this being one of those life-changing experiences for everyone involved.

Looming over the entire trek is McAllister's promise to break every bone in Rick's body if he so much as touches his niece Michelle ("That '70s Show's" Mila Kunis), a threat that sounds perfectly plausible coming from Hauer. Naturally, Michelle's not one to dwell much on rules, flirting with Rick from the very beginning -- although it's telling that his fantasies pertain to making partner, not getting lucky with his hot-blooded co-pilot.

Gourley, who looks like a young James Marsden with his clean-cut good looks and toothy white smile, never seems as dedicated to a career in law as his character professes. His primary task is to seem annoyed by everything happening around him, from Michelle's flatulent pet piglet to free-spirited Orlie (Heder).

Until Michelle drops his cell phone in the Gulf of Mexico, Rick makes frequent calls to his best friend back home in Miami (Hubbel Palmer, hilarious in small doses). He is otherwise without connections, and his family -- as we learn in the movie's most obvious detour -- is the furthest thing from normal.

But the film steers clear of any form of soul-searching or sentimentality, thereby depriving audiences of the personal resonance offered by such post-graduate identity-crisis pics as "Garden State" or "The Graduate."

One might expect Gourley to be more sympathetic toward the hillbillies he skewers along the way, considering he hails from the Heartland, but the film is content to deal almost exclusively in stereotypes, and rednecks make easy targets.

Black possesses an impressive visual instinct, enhanced by Doug Chamberlain's cinematography, which distinguishes the film from other modestly budgeted indies. A steady stream of pop songs reflect the mood swings in Rick and Michelle's relationship. **With:** Hubbel Palmer, Billy Drago, Peter Jason, Cathrine CQ Grace, Patrika Darbo, William Mapother, Zach Ward.

Camera (color, widescreen), Doug Chamberlain; editors, Masahiro Hirakubo, Chantelle Squires; music, Didier Lean Rachou; music supervisor, Debra A. Baum; production designer, Anne Black; set decorator, Ashley "Gigi" Hodges; costume designer, Brittney Leavitt; sound (Dolby Digital), Mark Noakes; assistant director, Lionel Maxwell; casting, Linda Phillips-Palo. Reviewed at Sunset 5, Los Angeles, Sept. 15, 2007. MPAA Rating: PG-13. Running time: 89 MIN.

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