

Film Review – ‘Rush’ is More Than Just Racing



It was never going to be an easy film for director Ron Howard to make, although if this film was going to be made, he certainly had the experience to do it. With films such as Apollo 13 and Frost/Nixon under his belt, Howard would have been well-aware of the fine balance that a film based on true events requires. Too faithful, and the effort can seem unwieldy and documentary-like. Too loose, and it runs the risk of alienating those who remember how the events really unfolded. Fortunately, Howard seems to have struck the balance perfectly with Rush, and the result is a film which serves to capture the spirit of an incredible season in Formula 1 while being exciting, compelling and visually exhilarating at the same time.

For those unfamiliar with Formula 1, Rush centres around the dramatic events of the 1976 season, where World Champion Ferrari driver Niki Lauda battled with McLaren driver and British hero James Hunt for the championship. Lauda stretched out a significant lead in the beginning of the season, but a terrible crash during the German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring saw the Austrian sustain life-threatening injuries and severe burns, leading many to believe that he would not survive the disaster. But – in a twist that seems made for Hollywood – Lauda pulled through and rejoined the championship battle with Hunt just six weeks after his crash. What followed was an end to the season which nobody could have predicted, and a story which seemed destined to make it onto the big screen one day.

At the heart of Rush is not the racing, but the racers. Both Lauda and Hunt were compelling in their own ways, and it is through the portrayal of these characters, as well as their

intense rivalry, that Rush is able to engage with the audience and pull them into the world of Formula 1. Lauda is played by German actor Daniel Brühl (Goodbye Lenin, Inglorious Basterds) in a performance which is as uncanny as it is nuanced. Brühl spent time with Lauda during filming, and as a result manages to wear the mannerisms and accent of the Austrian with striking similarity. Chris Hemsworth (Thor, The Avengers) takes on the formidable task of playing James Hunt, the charismatic driver who took a laissez-faire approach to the sport in contrast to Lauda's single-minded determination. Hunt died from a heart-attack at the age of forty-five, and while Hemsworth does an admirable job with what he has been given, he perhaps suffers from not having the advantage as Brühl did to be able to meet his character. Hemsworth's Hunt is charming, but at times seems to lack the depth and complexity which Brühl's performance exuded. Nevertheless, this is not a film where there is a hero and villain – both Lauda and Hunt are given scenes which highlight their strengths and their flaws. As a result, the tension and drama between the two characters is intensified throughout the film, culminating in a climactic finale and a touching monologue at the end from Lauda's character, accompanied by footage of the real-life drivers.

Although the characters may be the heart of the story, racing is still very much the soul and Howard pays tribute to the sport with some incredible visuals which are set alongside a fantastic soundtrack and the backdrop of screaming engines. While some of the racing is choppy and aided by the use of CGI, the aesthetics of the cars and the detail put into them perfectly evokes the era in which the film is set, from the mechanics right to the tobacco sponsorship which was plastered everywhere. Particularly impressive are the visuals of the Japanese Grand Prix at the end of the film, where the rain came down and soaked the track, and the terrible Nürburgring crash, which replicated the original footage almost identically. The crash, and Lauda's subsequent struggle for

his life, are a sombre reminder of the dangers of motorsport and were rendered even more poignant this week with the deaths of F1 test driver Maria de Villota, who died as a result of injuries sustained from a crash in 2012, and WEC driver Sean Edwards, who made an appearance in Rush as his father Guy, one of the drivers who pulled Lauda from the burning crash at the Nürburgring.

In the end, Rush manages to be more than just a film about racing. Formula 1 enthusiasts should enjoy the visuals and sounds, as well as the nostalgic evocation of the incredible 1976 season, if they can look past minor inaccuracies and changes. But even for those who know nothing about motorsports, this film is worth a watch. It manages to be both humorous and moving, detailed and thrilling, and at the very centre are two characters, two rivals, who battle over the course of the season to best the other. It is through their lives, their stories, that the spirit of the 1976 season truly comes alive.