Starring Nicholas Cage and the smokin' hot Eva Mendes, we dispatched Mitch to go review "Ghost Rider" for us this week out at the theaters. Mitch had mixed expectations going into this one, but as he puts it in the review, he was pleasantly suprised at not having to "leave the theater with the desire to immediately pound nails into his head or gargle Drano". How many footballs did it get from Mitch? Find out in his review of "Ghost Rider" ...

I went into “Ghost Rider” expecting to see bad CGI, stilted, lame dialog, bad acting, a bad script, and a plot with more holes than Swiss cheese.

And that’s exactly what I got. On the other hand, I also got to see some decent camp entertainment, and didn’t leave the theater with the desire to immediately pound nails into my head or gargle Drano.

Confused? Allow me to explain. “Ghost Rider”, unlike previous February releases based on comic books like “Daredevil” and “Constantine”, is not weighed down by lofty expectations and a desire to be a “meaningful” movie. It’s a popcorn flick with more camp than a boy scout jamboree and more cheese than the state of Wisconsin. And due to the lowered expectations, it feels better than what it really is.

Even with camp movies, there is a danger of them being too campy, and then collapsing under their own weight. “Snakes on a Plane” is the prime example of this. Yes, it was fun watching the over-the-top antics of everyone at the start. But it started out so quickly with the frantic, goofy tricks, and then half way through the movie it really had nowhere else to go. With “Ghost Rider”, you spend the first half of the movie not exactly bored, but still wondering when they were going to get past the exposition part of it and get on with the flaming skull. Once they got to that point, you get so caught up in the action that you forget how bad it really is.

And boy, does this movie take its time in getting going. First we meet up with the teenaged Johnny Blaze as he performs motorcycle stunts with his father at a Carny. Johnny is in love with the too-cute-for-words Roxanne, but she is to be sent away by her father because “Johnny isn’t good enough for her”. Johnny plans to run away with her, but that same day he discovers that his father will soon die of lung cancer. Out of nowhere, the devil appears, looking a lot like Peter Fonda doing a Clint Eastwood clenched jaw impersonation. He’ll cure dear old dad if Johnny sells his soul to him. Johnny is tricked into agreeing, but it turns out he is betrayed on a technicality. He rides past the waiting Roxanne in a rain storm, not to be seen again, until...

Fifteen or so years later, where Johnny’s looks have changed so much that he now has a frightening resemblance to Nicolas Cage. He’s now the Evel Knievel of his generation, jumping everything from semi trucks to helicopters in front of packed stadiums. But unlike his jumpsuit wearing predecessor, Johnny never seems to get a scratch when he wipes out. And he’s wacky! How do we know that? Because he doesn’t drink alcohol, but does pour red and yellow jellybeans into a martini glass to eat them! And he listens to the Carpenters and watches videos of monkeys in a downtown loft on the bad side of town that he doesn’t lock! Isn’t that all really crazy?

And then everything changes. Moments before he makes the big football stadium jump over the helicopters, the reclusive Johnny, who never grants interviews, is approached by none other than Roxanne...who is now a promising young reporter. Smitten once again by her, he is convinced that he has been given a second chance, and chases after her after his jump.

Let me now take a momentary tangent, as this has been driving my nuts since I saw the

movie, it is such a glaring mistake. Johnny jumps a football field...from the inside of one goal post to the other, and the idiots keep calling it “300 feet”. Not just once, but at least five times it is mentioned that he’s jumping/had jumped 300 feet. I’m practically screaming at the screen about the stupidity of the (a) writer, (b) editor, and (c) the entire production company that doesn’t seem to have one single person on staff that has ever watched a friggin’ football game.

But enough of that rampage. Johnny convinces Roxanne (played by Eva Mendes and her cleavage, which should demand separate credit as it gets so much screen time) to meet him for dinner, but unfortunately, she’s stood up as that just **happens** to be the evening that Mephistopheles comes collecting on his debt. Johnny is to become the Ghost Rider, the Devil’s own bounty hunter, collecting Souls For Satan (not quite Toys For Tots, is it?). He turns into a flaming skeleton, and his chopper turns into something out of Mattel’s Hot Wheels from Hell Collection (and it even comes to him when he whistles...like a horse...isn’t that cute?), and he’s off and flaming.

Satan has problems of his own in the form of a brat kid named Blackheart, played by “where has he been” Wes Bentley (the cute dope dealing kid next door from “American Beauty”), who is after a hidden contract for 1,000 of the most rotten souls imaginable. With his henchmen Earth, Wind, and Water (Johnny is Fire, so there goes that possible reference), Blackheart is hot on the trail of the long lost agreement, knowing the power he gains from it will allow him to overthrow his father, and turn the Earth into one big Goth Night.

The rest of the movie is one battle or escape scene after another. It is saved by two things. First is the appearance of Sam Elliot as “the Caretaker”, an old man in an old grave yard where Johnny just **happens** to land at daybreak following his first night as the Ghost Rider (he turns back into human form at daybreak). The Caretaker seems to know all about everything; the kind of quasi-narrator/mentor every superhero movie needs. Elliot’s leathered face and craggily voice are perfect for the part, even when he’s having to deliver such cringe inducing lines as “a man who sells his soul for love has the power to change the world.”

It’s hard to believe sometimes that Nicolas Cage once won an Oscar for Best Actor, given the bad choices he often makes regarding roles. This may not have been one of his wisest choices either, but he gives something to the role that both Ben Affleck in “Daredevil” and

Keanu Reeves in “Constantine” could not; a sense of self-deprecation. Affleck and Reeves’ reluctant heroes were so bogged down by melancholy, self-importance, and self-righteousness that they were boring beyond belief. Cage is able to sell Johnny as a noble hero because he presents him as such an amiable goofball that he’s taking on the burden because that’s what he **should** do, not what he **must** do.

Given the wealth of comic book heroes that have still not been portrayed on screen, it’s a bit strange that they would have chosen this obscure Marvel character, but maybe that’s what is best for this kind of film. Lately, every superhero shown in the movies is trying to out-angst the most neurotic one of all: Batman. It’s all angst, all the time; from Peter Parker’s sad-sack loser in “Spider-Man” to the constantly harassed mutants of the X-Men. So it is a nice break to have a superhero movie that has nothing to do with trying to make a character that others can relate to. Just watch the silly flaming skeleton kick the demons’ collective asses and pass the popcorn.

It’s a stupid, stupid movie. But you’ll have fun watching it on DVD.

My Rating: Kelly Holcomb (2 footballs).

Review Key:

Otto Graham: Over 4 Footballs. HOF quality movie

Bernie Kosar: 4 Footballs. Excellent

Brian Sipe: 3 ½ Footballs. Very Good

Frank Ryan: 3 Footballs. Good, solid film.

Bill Nelsen: 2 ½ Footballs. OK. Worth seeing at the theater.

Kelly Holcomb: 2 Footballs. Disappointingly inconsistent but some bright spots. Rent it on DVD.

Tim Couch: 1 ½ Footballs. Poor. Had potential, but lack of support led to an overall stinker.

Jeff Garcia: 1 Football. Horrible. All hype; no performance.

Mike Phipps: ½ Football. “We gave away Paul Warfield for THIS?” level of suck

Spergeon Wynn: No Footballs. UberSuckitude personified.

Charlie Frye: Incomplete.