

Review: Buckle up for a spectacular ride in Michael Mann's 'Ferrari'



- Enzo Ferrari biopic led by Adam Driver is spellbinding and seductive
- Mann had a good script, penned by the late Troy Kennedy Martin

CHENNAI: In a vague sort of way, the motorcar racing in “Ferrari” reminded me of the pulse-pounding chariot competition in the classic 1959 film “Ben-Hur” — Adam Driver’s race is as exciting, if not more. Directed by Michael Mann (“Ali,” “Collateral,” “Public Enemies”), the film is spectacular, spellbinding and seductive. It screened at the recent Red Sea International Film in Saudi Arabia and will open in theaters in the Kingdom on Jan. 4.



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Driver plays Enzo Ferrari, the Italian sports-car magnate, who faces a do-or-die situation. He has to win a 1,500-km motor endurance test; otherwise his company will crumble. And there are five drivers that Enzo has to take on. Several write letters to their partners, telling them how much they love them. They are all afraid that they may not survive the race.

In the Mille Miglia, as the race is called, there is every chance that cars may crash and burn. What is even more daring about the sport is that 250 km of the run is through Rome. The fear of death haunts every driver, including Enzo, whose calm exterior hides it.

The movie begins on an exciting note. Black-and-white imagery shows Enzo winning a race and becoming a champion. He launches his company in the post-war ruins of 1947, and 10 years later, Ferrari becomes the darling of everyone with its sexy-looking sports cars — sought by civilians and royalty alike.

But after a while, despite Enzo's keen business eye, his tightly-controlled finances begin to totter. His production tumbles to 100 units a year, and his business manager says that for Ferrari to survive, it needs to make at least 400. He has a plan. Go to the Mille Miglia, and win. You win on Sunday and sell on Monday, the man tells Enzo.

Enzo's fortunes are interlinked with his wife, Laura, played by the great Penelope Cruz. He had started his business with her help in Modena, where they live. But theirs is a relationship that blows hot and cold, and when their 24-year-old son dies, the marriage hits rock bottom.

Laura is devastated, but not Enzo, who has a second home with his mistress, Lina Lardi (Shailene Woodley), and their 12-year-old son, Piero.

Mann had a good script to work with, one penned by the late Troy Kennedy Martin. The production values are masterly, and the way the director stitches the narrative is just marvelous. And as the film weaves from racetrack to racetrack, the audience is made to realize that speed is Enzo's religion. A must watch.