Ferrari stalls out

Noah Baumbach, the Coen brothers, Jim Jarmusch, Martin Scorsese, Steven Soderbergh, Spike Lee, Terry Gilliam, Leos Carax, Ridley Scott – that's the ever-growing catalog of directors Adam Driver has worked with. And with *Ferrari*, add Michael Mann to that list.

To work with an auteur is to plug into their world. Driver isn't exactly versatile as an actor, but there is something undeniably magnetic about his physicality and the odd cadence of his voice. His presence feels classic in the way he fits into such a wide array of films. The gaps between Adam Sackler, Kylo Ren, and the guy who punched the wall in *Marriage Story* are not so wide. (They are all meme-able?)

Thematically, *Ferrari* is pure Michael Mann shit: the portrait of a man trapped by his own desires. Here, Mann unravels the myth of Italian engineer Enzo Ferrari, whose aerodynamic sports cars would define a generation of high-end automotive design. *But at what cost?* the movie asks, begging us to care while never exactly making clear how running a team of drivers gets Enzo to a legacy-defining car brand.

Driver's Ferrari is a man in conflict, reeling from the loss of his son, in love with his mistress (Shailene Woodley), out of love with his wife and business partner Laura (Penélope Cruz), and handling a car manufacturing business that is on the brink of insolvency. Ferrari is in the red, which seems fitting given the company's iconic color palette.

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A biopic often takes the scope of an entire life, and I

appreciate that Mann has resisted that in *Ferrari*. That said, Driver feels miscast and sometimes confused, his Italian accent not having improved since *House of Gucci*. (It feels like Woodley is in the movie solely to make Driver's Italian accent sound persuasive by comparison.) But it's less the performance itself than what the thin script asks him to carry. Character motivation feels assumed rather than animated. Enzo laments that his rivals at Maserati only enter competitions to support the business, whereas his pursuit is the purer inverse: sell cars to race.

I just wish that passion were more convincing. Sure, nobody likes accounting, but it takes an intense suspension of disbelief to watch Enzo be shocked to hear how low the sales of Ferrari automobiles he makes are. (Why wouldn't he already know?) We never get the sense that he even *likes* designing cars, racing, or winning. Mann's best film, the cat-and-mouse heist thriller *Heat*, is a story of two men who deeply appreciate how good the other is at their job. Meanwhile, is Enzo Ferrari actually a good engineer? We see him with a blueprint a couple of times, I guess. Is he managing his drivers well? Definitely not, as an early (and strangely comic) scene shows a crash that sends a driver's body flying into the air like a rag doll. Later, over wine and pasta, Enzo tries to inspire his racers: it's "our deadly passion, our terrible joy." (If that line sounds inspired, it's actually cribbed from Enzo Ferrari's memoir, *My Terrible Joys*.)

I want to credit *Ferrari* for being a weirder movie than you might expect for a biopic about a guy who builds iconic sports cars. But every swerve feels imprecise, and each detour just takes the film further in an unclear direction.