

Movie Review: The motorcycle Diaries

In 1952, a year before Stanley Kramer's fictionalized flick "The Wild Ones" about the Hollister Rally was released to American audiences, a real life motorcycle drama unfolded in South America involving two college students: Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the eventual leader of the Cuban revolution and his best friend Alberto Granado.

Ernesto kept a detailed diary of their undertaking, a formidable journey of 8,000 miles on a 1939 500cc Norton (dubbed "La Ponderosa" or "the Mighty One") over archaic 1952 roads in Argentina, Chile and Peru which took them through the remote Andes Mountains, across deserts and their final destination a leper colony in the Amazon jungle. The two were studying to be doctors. Even attempting such a feat was Homeric. Watch this movie and your next trip to Sturgis over paved roads will seem a cakewalk.

I first heard of Ernesto's diary while reading Christopher Baker's amazing book "Mi Moto Fidel" ("My Faithful Motorcycle") about his own 2-wheeled trip through Castro's Cuba. Baker says of the diary which was published in 1995, "Che was far from politically correct back then, how different in outlook and behavior the Argentinean was from the man who later earned world wide renown as a righteous upholder of virtue."

Baker continues, "Che spent most of the six month journey stealing food, bumming beds and seducing women." Although I have not had a chance to read the actual diaries, the movie appears to be faithful at least to this aspect of book.

Che may have been a revolutionary communist icon, revered by Marxists everywhere, but his current swashbuckling rock-star image on t-shirts and coffee mugs does nothing to acknowledge that Che was also the architect of mass murder and ruthless mayhem in Castro's early regime. However, the diary was written long before his ultimate fate and the movie steers clear of typical liberal pedantry and gives us a straight forward joyously raucous account to the duo's amazing trek.

This is a buddy flick in the spirit of Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty in "On the Road" or visually stunning as Fonda's Captain America and Billy in "Easy Rider." But Ernesto and Alberto are real people and movie almost has a documentary approach.

The actor Gael Bernal stars as the young Ernesto Guevara and Rodrigo de la Serna brilliantly portrays Alberto Grenado. Immediately, the differences between the two are magnified. Alberto is gregarious, Ernesto is sullen. Alberto can't help but lie about everything while Ernesto can't help but tell the truth. Alberto loves to dance, Ernesto has two left feet. Alberto wants to screw a girl in every town they go through, well so does Ernesto, he just seems a little shy. Thrown together astride the same piece of crap motorcycle over ridiculously undeveloped roads and there's an immediate comic effect. That they push the bike as much as

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