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## Bigger Than Life (C:SCOPE-COLOR)

James Mason in dramatic study of dangers of wonder drug, cortisone. Well-done.

Hollywood, Aug. 14.

20th-Fox release of James Mason production. Stars Mason, Barbara Rush, Walter Matthau; features: Robert Simon, Christopher Olsen, Roland Winters, Rusty Lane, Rachel Stephens, Kipp Hamilton. Directed by Nicholas Ray. Story and screenplay, Cyril Hume, Richard Mailbaum; based on a New Yorker article by Berton Rouche; camera (De Luxe Color), Joe MacDonald; editor, Louis Loeffler; music, David Raksin. Previewed Aug. 1, '56. Running time, 95 MINS.

Ed Avery .....	James Mason
Lou .....	Barbara Rush
Wally .....	Walter Matthau
Dr. Norton .....	Robert Simon
Richie Avery .....	Christopher Olsen
Dr. Ruric .....	Roland Winters
La Porta .....	Rusty Lane
Nurse .....	Rachel Stephens
Pat Wade .....	Kipp Hamilton
Mrs. La Porte .....	Betty Caulfield
Mrs. Jones .....	Virginia Carroll
Mr. Jones .....	Henry McEvoy
Mr. Byron .....	Bill Jones
Joe .....	Dee Aaker
Freddie .....	Jerry Mather
Nancy .....	Portland Mason
Mrs. Tyndal .....	Natalie Masters
Milkman .....	Richard Collier
Dr. McLennan .....	Lewis Charles
Cabby .....	John Monaghan
Druggist .....	Gus Schilling
Clergyman .....	Alex Frazer
Mrs. Edwards .....	Mary McAdoo
Salesladies .....	Mary Carver, Eugenia Paul
Lab Nurse .....	Gladys Richards
X-Ray Doctor .....	David Bedell
Nurse .....	Ann Spencer
Dr. Norton's Nurse .....	Nan Dolan

James Mason has picked a powerful subject for his first 20th-Fox production and delivers it with quite a bit of dramatic distinction in carrying out the supervisory duties and as the male lead subjected to a miracle drug experiment. "Bigger Than Life" exposes the good and bad in cortisone, showing it to have the potential to work great curative wonders, or to destroy physically and mentally a wrongful user. There's a certain amount of controversial material in such a subject and any pro and con that develops might be helpful at the boxoffice.

A great deal of care is taken in the forceful, realistically drafted screenplay by Cyril Hume and Richard Mailbaum to give both sides of the case, while at the same time telling a gripping, dramatic story of people that become very real under Nicholas Ray's wonder-working direction. The performances are standout under his

guidance, with Barbara Rush earning particular praise for her work as Mason's troubled wife. It's an extremely moving portrayal of great depth and shading.

Mason is exceptionally fine as the modestly-circumstanced grade school teacher who undergoes a series of experiments with cortisone in the hope he can be cured of a usually fatal disease. At first the experiments progress promisingly, but he begins to overdose himself and some startling personality changes occur, building a morbid kind of suspense to the smashingly dramatic climax in which the teacher is prevented from carrying out his intention of killing his son, his wife and himself. A hopefully happy ending put a believable tag on the absorbing 95 minutes.

Christopher Olsen scores with his tremendously effective study of Mason's young son. There's no touch of moppet precociousness in his playing. Walter Matthau registers strongly as the family friend who prevents a tragic end to the story, while Robert Simon and Roland Winters are good as doctors. Rusty Lane, school principal; Kipp Hamilton, a flirty teacher; Rachel Stephens, a nurse; Lewis Charles, Gus Schilling and others lend the melodrama very good support.

The CinemaScope lensing in De Luxe Color by Joe MacDonald leads the list of a number of stand-out assists, which include editing by Louis Loeffler; sound by W. D. Flick and Harry M. Leonard, art direction and set decorations by Lyle R. Wheeler and Jack Martin Smith, and Walter M. Scott and Stuart A. Reiss, respectively. David Raksin's score, conducted by Lionel Newman, figures importantly. *Brog.*