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ADULTERY, A USER'S MANUAL

(ADULTERE, MODE D'EMPLOI)

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A Pan Europeenne release (in France) of a Franco-Suisse Cine Manufacture/PXP Prods/France 2 Cinema/Television Suisse Romande/Teleclub production, in association with CNC (Paris), Office Federal de la Culture (Berne) and Canal Plus. Produced by Robert Boner.

Directed by Christine Pascal. Screenplay by Pascal, Boner. Camera (color), Renato Berta; editor, Jacques Comets; music, Bruno Coulais; production design, Sylvie Olive; costume design, Anne Schotte; sound, Jean-Jacques Ferran. Reviewed at Club 13 screening room, Paris, June 19, 1995. Runningtime: **95 MIN.**

Simon Richard Berry
Fabienne Karin Viard
Bruno Vincent Cassel
Sarah Emmanuelle Halimi

With: Liliane Rovere, Anny Romand, Helene Fillieres, Patrice-Flora Praxo, Marina Rodriguez-Tome.

The title suggests French author Georges Perec's finest work ("Life: A User's Manual") and the best of a Gallic faculty for farce that stretches back to Feydeau and Labiche. Unfortunately, Christine Pascal's "Adultery, A User's Manual" comes nowhere near either tradition, its eager young principals wasted on a scarcely credible exercise in aimlessly tame eroticism.

Pic will interest only the most ineffectually prurient of arthouse crowds and should soon be shelved in Euro vid stores. A boost at the Gallic box office is guaranteed by the presence of up-and-coming heart-throb Vincent Cassel, seen recently in the immensely popular "Hate."

Actress Pascal's fifth outing as a helmer, "Adultery" shows the same technical excellence as her "And the Little Prince Said" and "Zanzibar," especially in lensing lengthy interior scenes. Whether it all adds up to something remotely plausible is another matter.

Fabienne (Karen Viard) and Bruno (Cassel) are a young Parisian architect couple awaiting the results of a prestigious contest they've entered. Pic follows them around during this one special day of their professional and personal lives.

Their best friend, Simon (Richard Berry), a middle-aged Lebanese businessman, playboy and sometime drug dealer, eventually ends up fondling Fabienne once she realizes how faithless Bruno has been to her throughout their marriage. Bruno, meantime, goes to an assignation, is tied up, aroused and finally sated in a scene that is as endless and pointless as it is modest and quaint.

In the end, the contest result is known, the truth outs, and dozens of boxes of hashish are discovered in a friend's apartment. These are subsequently thrown off the back of a truck, in pic's best moment, by the bitter Bruno as he realizes that his wife is performing a lewd act with

Simon in a nearby car. Next morning, all is forgiven in a bubble bath.

"Adultery" reads better than it plays, which may be why Cassel and Viard, two first-rate young thespians, agreed to take part. Viard's perf as the flighty Fabienne is a small, volatile gem. As handsome hedonist Bruno, Cassel is devastatingly convincing, even in those moments when the script calls for outlandish behavioral swerves. Veteran thespian Richard Berry merely survives, in a thankless role as a man of the world in love with a sensual neophyte.

Pic is an odd assortment of outdated sexual lore — women cheat for love, men cheat for fun — old-fashioned hipness re hashish and passe treatment of scenes of intimacy. More "Brief Encounter" than "Fatal Attraction" in its sensibility, "Adultery" should remain a curio for collectors of misconceived erotica.

Tech credits are excellent and the few scenes of Paris's Pigalle district enliven a viewing experience that is more monotonous than monogamous.

—Stephen O'Shea