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Airplane (COLOR)

Can't stop the laughs.

Hollywood, June 6.

A Paramount Pictures release of a Howard W. Koch production. Produced by Jon Davison. Features entire cast. Executive producers, directed, written by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, Jerry Zucker. Camera (Metrocolor), Joseph Biroc; editor, Patrick Kennedy; music, Elmer Bernstein; production design, Ward Preston; set design, Joe Hubbard; set decoration, Anne D. McCulley; costume design, Rosanna Norton; sound, Tom Overton; assistant director, Aren Schmidt. Reviewed at Paramount Studios, Hollywood, June 6, 1980. (MPAA Rating: PG.) Running time: 88 MINS.

Ted Striker	Robert Hays
Elaine	Julie Hagerty
Murdock	Kareem Abdul-Jabbar
McCroskey	Lloyd Bridges
Captain Oveur	Peter Graves
Dr. Rumack	Leslie Nielsen
Randy	Lorna Patterson
Kramer	Robert Stack
Johnny	Stephen Stucker

"Airplane" is what they used to call a laff-riot. Made by team which turned out "Kentucky Fried Movie" a couple of seasons back, this spoof of disaster features beats any other film on the horizon for sheer number of comic gags and lines and may prove to be just what audiences and exhibs are looking for in the way of a good-time sleeper hit.

Writer-directors Jim Abrahams, David Zucker and Jerry Zucker leave no cliché unturned as they lay waste to the "Airport"-style disaster cycle, among other targets. From the clever, "Jaws" take-off opening to the final, irreverent title card, laughs come thick and fast, and only audience frustration may come from not being able to hear all the dialog above the audible reaction.

Plot is derived from a 1957 Paramount release called "Zero Hour!" starring Dana Andrews, Sterling Hayden and Linda Darnell and has former pilot Robert Hays, now terrified of flying due to wartime malfeasance, boarding an L.A.-to-Chicago flight in pursuit of ex-girlfriend stewardess Julie Hagerty.

When flight personnel, including sexually-deviant pilot Peter Graves and co-pilot Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, contract food poisoning on board, Hays is called upon to land the craft safely, an effort not made easier by fact that air controller Lloyd Bridges is completely crazed and the man talking him down, Robert Stack, hates him for his wartime conduct.

All of this is just a rack upon which the Zuckers and Abrahams hang their determinedly flipped-out conceits, many of which may be thin but which are so relentless as to keep the laughter more or less continuous.

Desired effect, which has been achieved, is that of watching a bad 1950s drama in which characters carry all the absurdly pressurized situations to their furthest comic extremes. That this works is largely due to astute casting of such recognizable types as Lloyd Bridges, Robert Stack, Peter Graves and Leslie Nielsen in sort of roles they've played frequently in the past, but never in this fashion.

Along with Abdul-Jabbar as a flyer, wacky cameos include Ethel Merman as a hospital patient who sits up in her bed and sings "Everything's Coming Up Roses," Maureen McGovern as a nun and tax-cut fanatic Howard Jarvis as a victimized taxi passenger.

Pic has been extremely well produced on low budget by Jon Davison under production banner of Howard W. Koch, and attention to detail is exemplary not only in casting but in subtle nuances, such as wonderfully overdone score by Elmer Bernstein, heavy contrast "studio"-style lensing by Joseph Biroc and having jet airliner give off noise of a prop plane, which helps evoke the 1950s ambiance.

Robert Hays and Julie Hagerty hit the proper mock-earnest tone as the quarreling lovers pushed together through mutual jeopardy, but can't help but seem the straights in a world full of zanies. Parody may be the lowest form of humor, but few comedies in ages have rocked the laugh meter this hard. —Cart.