

## Document Citation

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Author(s)	Todd McCarthy
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**NO ESCAPE:** Greg Kinnear stars with Maria Bello in "Auto Focus," which follows the downward spiral of "Hogan's Heroes" actor Bob Crane.

## TELLURIDE

### AUTO FOCUS

A Sony Pictures Classics release presented in association with Propaganda Films and Good Machine. Produced by Scott Alexander, Larry Karaszewski, Todd Rosken, Pat Dollard, Alicia Allain. Executive producers, Trevor Macy, Rick Hess, James Schamus. Co-producer, Brian Oliver.

Directed by Paul Schrader. Screenplay, Michael Gerbosi, based on the book "The Murder of Bob Crane" by Robert Graysmith. Camera (Deluxe color), Fred Murphy; editor, Kristina Boden; music, Angelo Badalamenti; music supervisor, G. Marq Roswell; production designer, James Chinlund; art director, Seth Reed; set designer, Sam Pope; set decorator, Gene Sedena; costume designer, Julie Weiss; sound (Dolby Digital/SDDS), Steve Aaron; supervising sound editor, Steve Munro; special makeup and prosthetic effects, Joel Harlow, Rob Hinderstein; assistant director, Aaron Barsky; casting, Wendy Kurtzman. Reviewed at Sony Studios, Culver City, Aug. 28, 2002. (In Telluride, Toronto and New York Film Festivals.) MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 105 MIN.

Bob Crane ..... Greg Kinnear  
John Carpenter ..... Willem Dafoe  
Anne Crane ..... Rita Wilson  
Patricia Crane ..... Maria Bello  
Lenny ..... Ron Leibman  
Werner Klemperer/  
Klink ..... Kurt Fuller  
Mel Rosen ..... Ed Begley Jr.

Richard Dawson ..... Michael Rodgers  
Video Executive ..... Michael McKean  
Robert Clary/  
LeBeau ..... Christopher Neiman  
Feldman,  
"Hogan's" Producer .. Bruce Solomon  
John Banner/Schultz ..... Lyle Kanouse

## 'Focus' deconstructs Crane

By TODD McCARTHY

**T**he point where the sins of the flesh intersect with the entitlement and delusions provided by celebrity is provocatively explored in "Auto Focus." An astute account of the downward life spiral of "Hogan's Heroes" star Bob Crane from upright family man to sex addict, obsessive pornographer and murder victim, this true-life saga of sex, lies and videotape is one of director Paul Schrader's best films, and like "Boogie Nights" it ranks as a shrewd expose of recent Hollywood's slimy underside. Sony Pictures Classics should have no trouble positioning this picture as a leading specialized title for the

fall, with some crossover possible to curious general auds.

Although written by first-time scenarist Michael Gerbosi and co-produced by those experts in the biographical marginalia of pop culture, Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski, "Auto Focus" fits snugly with many of Schrader's long-standing concerns, including the severe pendulum swing from religious belief to depravity, fractures within families, the consequences of extreme behavior and the convulsive effects of violence.

Happily, new pic also possesses an uncanny lightness of touch, a trait considerably furthered by Greg Kinnear's adroit performance as a blandly genial personality

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**FILM**





**CRANE CRONIES:** Willem Dafoe plays John Carpenter and Donna-Marie Recco is Mistress Victoria in Sony biopic "Auto Focus."

## AUTO FOCUS

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whose blindness to the damage his sleazy behavior does to others ultimately comes home to roost in tragedy.

In the early '60s, Bob Crane is a popular Los Angeles radio host, a clean-cut Catholic and father of three, whose only apparent deviation from an Ozzie & Harriet lifestyle seems to be his collection of "nature" and men's magazines. Wife Anne (Rita Wilson) would just as soon return to suburbia in their native Connecticut, but she doesn't complain when her husband lands the lead in a new comedy series about a bunch of Allied soldiers who weekly outwit their Nazi captors at a WWII POW camp.

The show becomes an instant hit, but changing Crane's life just as much as his new celebrity status is John Carpenter (Willem Dafoe). An affable lowlife, Carpenter works for Sony, promoting a brand-new product — portable video equipment — and the two men soon are hitting Hollywood strip joints, picking up girls and, once Crane's fragile moral qualms are demolished, recording their sex parties on Polaroids and first-generation homevideo gear. "We are light-years ahead of everybody," Carpenter boasts.

By the time Anne finds a stash of incriminating photographs at home, Crane could scarcely care less, so immersed is he in his nightly trolling for young beauties readily impressed by his fame, easygoing ways and groovy camera toys. Simultaneously, he's falling for a sexy young actress, Patricia (Maria Bello), who's recently joined the "Hogan's" cast and has a hippie-era tolerance of Crane's compulsive philandering.

But "Hogan's Heroes," like the war, is over after six years, and from this point on, the sexcapades entirely take over Crane's life. It's the same for Carpenter, who's long since been fired by Sony. As they push into middle age, with Crane reduced to dinner-theater work and his new marriage to Patricia turning into a replay of his first, they make an increasingly pathetic pair as they persist with their swinging ways at cheap bars in second-rate towns.

Although the film's final section turns mildly arty as it builds to the murder that remains unsolved but almost certainly was committed by Carpenter, all that comes before is remarkably buoyant, lively and ob-

servant.

"A day without sex is a day wasted" is the men's motto, and Crane's absorption in his pastime couldn't be more complete, as he catalogs, edits and relentlessly rewatches his voluminous encounters; at one point, he starts cutting his personal hardcore footage into commercial TV tapes, and plots an all-star porno feature film, in which he would no doubt figure prominently with his new "penile enhancement."

Told repeatedly by his agent (Ron Leibman) that his extracurricular activities are creating an "image problem" that's making job offers scarce, Crane blithely responds, "Tell them sex is normal" and that since he doesn't drink, smoke or do drugs, having only one vice puts him at least one up on most actors.

Script and Kinnear's performance are very good at showing how Crane just doesn't get it; he's so far into his trip that even the thought of what it's all done to his wives and kids doesn't weigh heavily on him. At least the way the film portrays him, it seems almost inconceivable that Crane ever could have changed.

Schrader directs with a smooth hand, providing a good-natured and frequently amusing spin to eventually grim material that aptly reflects the protagonist's almost unfailing good humor. Visual scheme the director has worked out in concert with lenser Fred Murphy, who turns in some career-best work here, as well as with production designer James Chinlund and costume designer Julie Weiss, features a gradual gradation of color from beautiful soft pastels in the early going to increasingly dark hues later on. Pic overall has an excellent L.A. period feel without getting elaborate about it, and musical contributions by Angelo Badalamenti and a host of pop tunes are tops.

With a ready smile and hair dyed black, Kinnear gives a good physical account of his true-life character and is particularly effective in delineating the moments when Crane's longtime straitlaced and proper side is gleefully cast off in favor of hedonism.

Dafoe gradually reveals the insecurities of a man who begins with Crane as a valued provider, only to become a craven toady with no prospects once his buddy casts him off. Supporting cast standout is Bello, who calls the young Tuesday Weld to mind as a beautiful '60s free spirit who has the grave misfortune to get sucked into Crane's selfish world.