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Author(s)	David Stratton
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Variety

CARI
FOTTUTISSIMI AMICI
(DEAR GODDAMNED FRIENDS)
(ITALIAN)

A Pentafilm-Officina Cinematografica production. Produced by Mario and Vittorio Cecchi Gori. Executive producer, Luciano Luna. Directed by Mario Monicelli. Screenplay, Monicelli, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Leo Benvenuti, Piero de Bernardi. Camera (color), Antonio Nardi; editor, Ruggero Mastroianni; music, Renzo Arbore; production design, Franco Velchi; costumes, Lina Taviani; sound, Maurizio Argentieri. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (competing), Feb. 17, 1994. Running time: 118 MIN.

Dieci (Ten)	Paolo Villaggio
Martini	Massimo Ceccherini
Callichero	Vittorio Benedetti
Calamai	Marco Graziani
Taddei	Giuseppe Oppedisano
Washington	Chris Childs
Shaved Head	Beatrice Macola
Wilma	Antonella Ponziani
Topana	Eva Grimaldi
Fortini	Paolo Hendel
Zingaro	Novello Novelli

Mainstream, grassroots Italian comedy has never exported very well, and though veteran Mario Monicelli's "Dear Goddamned Friends" may mop up in Italy and a couple of other Euro territories, it probably won't travel, unlike its energetic characters. This World War II road movie is filled with familiar comedy ingredients and is fitfully funny, but the journey goes on much too long.

Monicelli, now in his 79th year, has been directing comedies for six decades. He started out working with the celebrated clown Toto, and is best known for "Big Deal on Madonna Street" (1958) and "The Great War" (1959). He teams here with the popular Italo comic Paolo Villaggio, a rotund thesp who worked for years on the "Fantozzi" series and who co-starred with Roberto Benigni in Federico Fellini's little-seen last film, "Voice of the Moon."

It's August 1944, and Italy has been liberated by the Allies, but in Florence there's a shortage of all essentials. Villaggio plays a former boxer nicknamed Dieci (Ten) because he always went down for the count. He dreams up the idea of gathering a few layabouts and traveling the back roads of Tuscany putting on boxing bouts to raise a little cash, or even food and wine. The fact that none of his troupe has any boxing experience doesn't much matter.

The ragged bunch, accompanied by a stray dog, set off in a ramshackle bus with no brakes and are joined along the way by a black deserter from the American Army (winningly played by Chris Childs); a woman they call Shaved Head (Beatrice Macola) because she'd slept with a German and her hair had been shaved by partisans; and, ultimately, the vengeful Wilma (Antonella Ponziani), who seeks revenge on the partisan who'd wronged her.

Comic highlights include a couple of boxing bouts, one against American soldiers in which the Italians are routed and a riot ensues. There are also running gags, like the guy who's lost his wife and his leather boots; when he finally finds the man who stole his boots, he shoots him. Basically, the film's jokes are as old as the Tuscan hills.

The countryside and small towns

through which the characters pass are breathtakingly beautiful, even though scarred by war (and the war still goes on with the occasional gun battle or explosion). But the leisurely pacing, familiar material and broad comic acting won't be to the taste of many outside Italy, and the attitude toward women, though no doubt reflecting the way it was then, is also a problem.

Nevertheless, the film shows a grand old director still capably doing a professional job, and an ensemble cast who enter into the spirit of the piece.

Technical credits are all very fine, and though Renzo Arbore is the official music composer, much of the music on the soundtrack comes from the American big bands of the era — Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Harry James and the Dorseys.

—David Stratton