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FULL SPEED

(A TOUTE VITESSE)

(FRENCH)

A Polygram Film Distribution release of a Magouric presentation of a Magouric Prods./Telema/France 2 Cinema/Rhone-Alpes Cinema production, with participation of Cofimage 7, Canal Plus, the Rhone-Alpes region, CNC. (International sales: Leonor Films, Paris.) Produced by Laurent Benegui.

Directed by Gael Morel. Screenplay, Morel, Catherine Corsini. Camera (color), Jeanne Lapoirie; editor, Catherine Schwartz; music, selections from Big Cheese Records; art direction, Frederique Hurpeau; set decoration, Gabriel Cascarino; costume design, Brigitte Faur-Perdigou; sound (Dolby), Ludovic Henault, Francois Groult; associate producer, Charles Gassot; assistant director, Olivier Coulhon. Reviewed at Club de l'Etoile screening room, Paris, April 29, 1996. (In Cannes Film Festival — Cinemas en France.) Running time: **84 MIN.**

Julie Elodie Bouchez
Jimmy Stephane Rideau
Quentin Pascal Cervo
Samir Meziane Bardadi
With: Romain Auger, Salim Kechiouche, Mohammed Dib, Paul Morel.

With "Full Speed," an arty and heartfelt look at provincial French youths on the cusp of adulthood, Andre Techine protege Gael Morel seems destined to draw inevitable — and mostly unflattering — comparisons to the master. But thesp-turned-auteur Morel, 23, has crafted a lush, if borderline ridiculous, drama that celebrates the all-or-nothing intensity of being 20 years old. Although bona fide adults may have little patience with pic's pretensions, story could click with adolescent viewers, gay fests and anyone who thinks that youthful bodies wrestling with intense emotions are reason enough to make a feature film.

Slam-bang pre-credits sequence has 16-year-old Samir (Meziane Bardadi) and Rick slicing their fingers and swearing blood-brother allegiance. In an abrupt and unexplained incident, Rick is accidentally shot and dies in Samir's arms.

Two years later, middle-class university student Julie (Elodie Bouchez) learns from her working-class b.f., Quentin (Pascal Cervo), that his first novel — a thinly veiled account of their immediate circle of friends — is about to be published. Quentin's destiny lies in Paris, but for the time being he's still hanging out with his friends in the projects outside Lyon.

His longtime buddy Jimmy (Stephane Rideau) is a sensual hunk who admires Quentin's intellectual side but prefers the visceral rush of dancing to rap music or zipping along the open road on his motorcycle to the life of the mind.

At a party, Quentin meets Samir, a transplanted Algerian who is at one with his homosexuality but troubled by his cultural heritage. Quentin, hungry for material to appropriate for his second book, cajoles Samir into recounting the story of his joyous complicity with Rick, which Samir reluctantly provides. But Samir falls hard for Quentin, who rejects his advances with disgust.

Julie, the lone femme in sight, brims with devious vitality, but this is a story about guys in which their insouciance will soon give way to the kind of melodramatic tragedy that leaves lifelong scars.

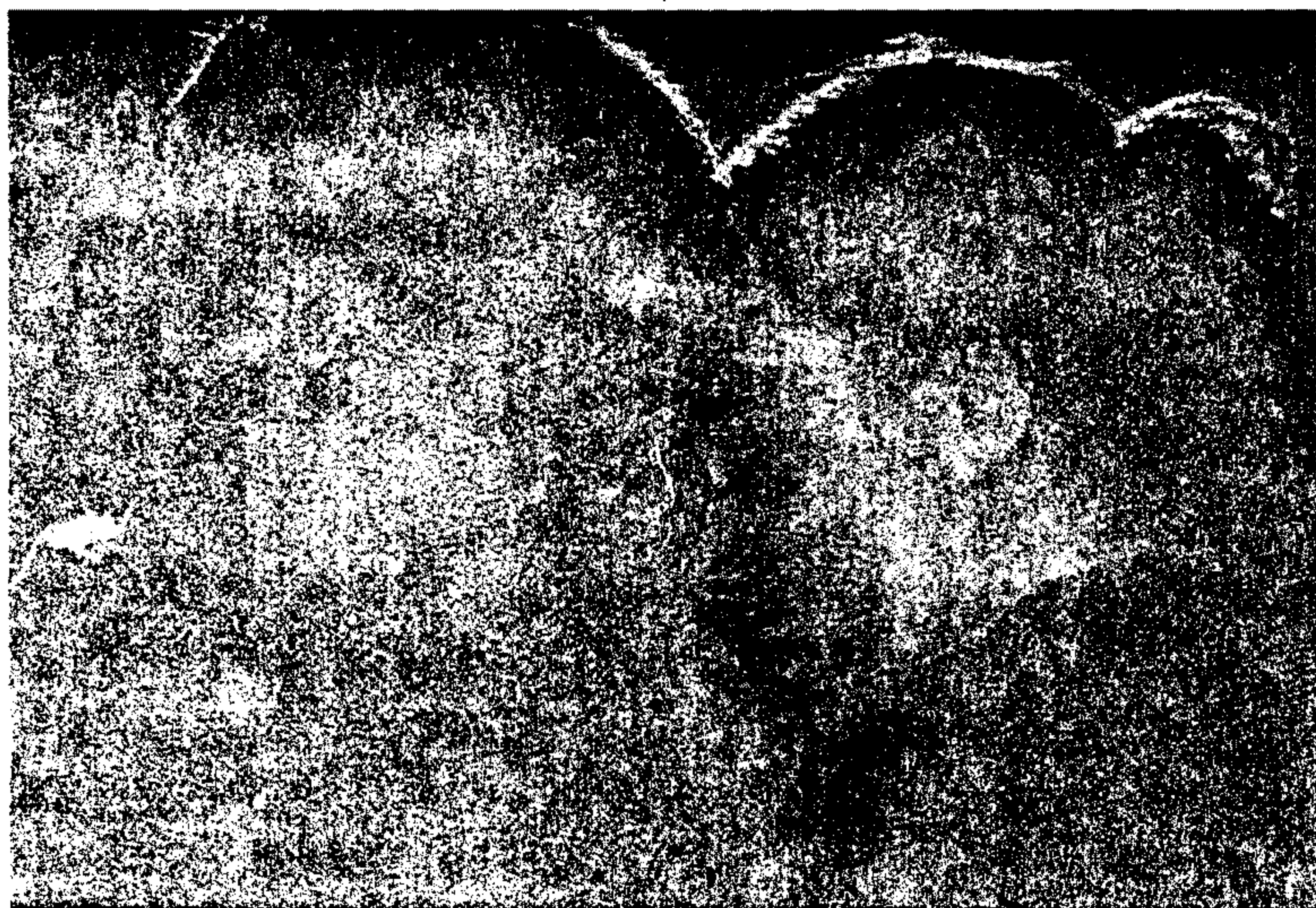
Lensing revels in sensation: cars with open sun roofs, dancing, amusement park rides, trysting in the mud, knife fights on the patio. Morel is fond of lateral tracking shots and anything else that imparts the notion of constant movement. Close-ups of youthful faces and youthful bodies abound.

Adults are only slightly more present than in a "Peanuts" special: This is a youthful universe, tied up in youthful concerns. The often pretentious dialogue is spat out as though words are a necessary but cumbersome evil, and the thesp's cadences are simultaneously lazy and impatient.

Rideau (the taciturn hunk in "Wild Reeds") is a doomed working-class hero, his musculature more eloquent than his speech. Cervo — who seems to be at least partly a stand-in for Morel — lends some depth to his assignment as a turncoat weasel.

Morel — to whom Techine offered the gay role in "Wild Reeds" after a chance meeting in a movie theater — appears to have bolstered serendipity with ambition and more than a dollop of talent. As a first film, "Full Speed" is assured, if derivative. Whatever the pic's reception (it opens in Gaul on Sept. 25), we're certain to hear more from Morel on both sides of the camera.

—Lisa Nesselson



TEEN SCENE: Pascal Cervo and Elodie Bouchez appear in "Full Speed."