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White Lightning is a 1973 American action film directed by Joseph Sargent, with William W. Norton writin the screenplay, and starring Burt Reynolds, Jennifer Billingsley, Ned Beatty, Bo Hopkins, R. G. Armstrong annd Diane Ladd. ========== The film markes Laura Dern's debut. White Lightning: A Film of Its Time The plot focuses on Bobby “Gator” McLusky, a former moonshine runner incarcerated at an Arkansas state prison. Gator's exemplary behavior in prison has seen him become a favored convict of the warden and guards, but upon learning that his younger brother, Donny, has been murdered, perhaps by corrupt Bogen County Sheriff J.C. Connors, he attempts to escape in order to be with his family in his time of grief. He is, however, quickly apprehended by guards before he can make it out of the prison. Gator is aware of the fact that Sheriff Connors has long been taking money to look the other way on moonshine sales in his county, so he strikes a deal with Federal Treasury agents to be let out of prison early and go undercover, ostensibly to procure evidence of the Sheriff’s malfeasance. Gator doesn’t divulge to them his true motive for pursuing the lawman though: to exact revenge for his brother’s murder. The agents provide Gator with a high-performance car, and the name of a contact, Dude Watson, a mechanic and moonshine runner who is on federal probation, and can therefore be leaned on by Gator to help him get to Connors. Gator meets Watson, and posing as a Federal agent, pressures the man to introduce Gator to Roy Boone, the county’s biggest booze runner. Having established a way to get close to Connors through Big Bear, Gator begins to plot his revenge on the sheriff. Before he can execute his plans though, Conners discovers that Gator is working for the feds and sends Big Bear to take Gater out. Barely escaping with his life, Gator hides out at a convent. It doesn’t take long for Connors to locate Gator, and he and his men descend on the convent. Gator leaps into his car and a to-the-death, high-speed pursuit ensues between him and the sheriff. White Lightning is very much a film of its time, when lone-wolf anti-heroes were all the rage in Hollywood films. The character of Gator, who rails against the system and is willing to bring it down by any means necessary, is very similar to other characters of the period such as Kowalski in Vanishing Point, Larry in Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry, and the eponymous protagonists in Thunderbolt and Lightfoot. Reynolds, superb in the movie, plays Gator with equal touches of ruthlessness and sensitivity, allowing the viewer to commiserate with his plight and motivations. The rest of the cast is equally terrific, with Ned Beatty, in particular, effortlessly conveying a sense of menace and lethality in Sheriff Connors, without a lone instance of on-screen violence or bad guy histrionics. It could very well be the finest performance of his long and illustrious career. While the movie definitely exhibits a laconic, old-school pacing, it never drags, and Joseph Sargent’s superb direction and William Norton’s finely crafted script can be thanked for that. Even when there’s no on-screen action occurring, every moment of the picture is packed with interesting character development, something that is often lacking in today’s films of this ilk. Likewise, the story’s cause and effect loops are intricate and believable. There are no holes in the story or lapses of logic here. As far as the movie’s technical aspects are concerned, all are superbly done. The film has a good sound systemThe film White Lightning excels as an actioner, capturing the essence of the Deep South's decay and lawlessness through its cinematography. The editing is fluid, propelling the narrative forward without any noticeable hiccups. The only criticism one can make regarding the storytelling is that the climax and resolution feel somewhat underwhelming after the lengthy build-up. However, this does not detract from the film's overall impact. Gator's ride in the movie is a moonshine runner's dream, a 1971 Ford Custom 500 sedan that has been heavily modified with a 429 Police Interceptor motor, a four-speed manual transmission, and stiffened suspension. The car's appearance is consistent with its description, although it is noted that the engine may not be entirely accurate. The film features a variety of cars, including 1965, 1971, and 1972 Ford Custom 500 police cars, as well as stripped-down stock cars in a dirt track race scene. While these cars may not be particularly iconic, their appearance during the film's many chase sequences makes up for it. The stunt work in the movie is exceptional, with legendary stunt driver Hal Needham performing numerous death-defying stunts, including a 63-foot jump from a riverbank onto a moving barge and another impressive jump where Sheriff Connor's police cruiser passes over Gator's car and lands in a lake.Highly enjoyable film, despite being dated, still satisfies with its well-developed characters, good technical aspects, and impressive car chases. ========== If you're a fan of Burt Reynolds or old-school car movies, this is a great choice. The movie features Gator, Sheriff Connors, Roy Boone, and others, which will likely appeal to fans of the era. I give White Lightning seven out of ten pistons and recommend watching it. You won't be disappointed. Note: I have removed the translation options and focus on creative paraphrasing while maintaining the original text's language.

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