SENNA the movie

Review by Larry Mason

Winner of the Audience Award World Cinema Documentary at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival and the Audience Award for Best International Feature at the 2011 Los Angeles Film Festival, I saw this movie and it left me wanting to see it again.

One of the greatest racing drivers of all time was killed while leading his last Formula One Grand Prix in Imola, Italy. He burst upon the F1 scene and nearly won Monaco after just his sixth start. In fact, the world will never know whether he would've won, but he was seconds a lap faster than every other driver there in the rain that day. The red flag was shown just as he was about to pounce on Alain Prost for the lead of the race.

This documentary winds through the twists and turns of Senna's life both inside and outside of the cockpit and rivets the viewer with some of the persecution he faced throughout his career. His life off the track with family and friends is in stark contrast to the pressure of race



weekends. The politics of racing are on full display to see from behind the scenes, with fly on the wall closeness, in behind-closed-door driver's meetings with bombastic FISA president Jean Marie Balestre as well as outspoken Formula One World Champion drivers - primarily Alain Prost.

Whether you were a fan of Senna or not; his talent behind the wheel to extract the most out of a race car is undeniable. This movie really puts you in a position to understand his viewpoint and what he went through in his career. For a race fan, it's fascinating to watch his career unfold before you. For a non-race fan, this movie really demonstrates what it's like to strap yourself into the cockpit, and face the danger auto racing presents. What's more is that if you never knew who Senna was, you'd have a great appreciation for who he was as well as a greater appreciation for the sport.

Some scenes leave the viewer to decide if Senna is persecuted by his peers and icons, or if he has had so much success and adulation that he is delusional about his on-track actions. Nevertheless, there are many moments that leave you in awe of what he was capable of on the track. It also highlights the fragility of the human spirit when fighting an uphill battle without the proper equipment.

Lighthearted moments, both personal and in the publice eye distract you for a short time, however you know that the inevitable fatal crash is coming. The director puts you in the cockpit with Senna on that fateful day moments before the horrific crash at the Tamburello corner.

The on-board video is represented in a grainy film format to start and gradually improves over the course of the film however, an early in-car lap at Monaco was terribly distracting as the sound of the engine note failed to match where the car was on track. Of course, back in the day, those types of limitations did happen, it nonetheless distracts from an otherwise stellar in-car experience.

I highly recommend this film for both serious and casual race fans alike and for those who want to learn more about why racing draws such passionate fans. Keep in mind that the language used is often raw and to top it off, it's written in the subtitles when he's speaking Portuguese or being interviewed by Brazilian TV. Poignant moments abound in this film and it'll leave you talking about how and why certain things happened. It's also quite interesting to see how a superstar handled unpleasant situations that most people have lived through at one point in time in their lives.

Directed by BAFTA award winning filmmaker Asif Kapadia, produced by a team whose film credits include: Bridge Jones's Diary, Four Weddings and a Funeral, and Notting Hill, and composed by Brazilian Antonio Pinto; these talented individuals have brought to the big screen what was attempted many times before yet never accomplished. SENNA is made with the full cooperation of Senna's family and includes never before seen family footage. The music will move you and heighten your emotions throughout the film.

SENNA the movie will be in limited release. For a complete list of showings, go to www.sennamovie.com where you can also watch the official movie trailer.

Running Time: 104 minutes

Rating: PG-13