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## EVENHAND

Rating:

Director: Joseph Pierson

Producer: Fernando Cano, Joseph Pierson

Writer: Mike Jones

Director of Photography: Tim Orr

Cast: Bill Sage, Bill Dawes, Io Tillet Wright, Mirelly Taylor

Visit the [IMDB page](#) for full cast and crew

Review by: [Warren Curry](#)

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Director Joseph Pierson's *EvenHand* is an intriguing work that dares to contrast often-conflicting tones. The movie begins as a subtly comic look at the life of two police officers in the lower middle class area of a fictional Texas city and evolves into a poignant examination of the same subject. Given that the film mixes elements of a crime drama, a buddy pic and the familiar slice-of-life indie movie, it's an achievement that Pierson is able to imbue *EvenHand* with a discernible focus. While there are plenty of ups and downs along the way, the disparate aspects of the movie manage to blend together quite well.

Officer Rob Francis (Bill Dawes) has just transferred to the San Lovisa police department and is partnered with the squad's resident loose nut, Officer Ted Morning (Hal Hartley regular Bill Sage). The crime-fighting duo's days consist of harassing a young drug dealer (Io Tillet Wright), breaking up a perpetual domestic dispute between an unhappily married couple and keeping tabs on an increasingly dangerous and disturbed man named Mather (Lawrence Stringer). Francis also manages to find time to flirt shyly with a cashier (Mirelly Taylor) at a local mini-mart.

Francis is quickly indoctrinated into Morning's slightly askew world of justice. Francis is a completely by-the-books officer, surprisingly passive for his profession, whereas Morning believes that rules can be bent if the end goal is ultimately obtained. Both schools of thought eventually create problems for each man.

Francis and Morning's relationship is the spark that drives this film. The two men, although on opposite sides of the spectrum in many regards, grow to understand the other's point of view (even if it's perhaps grudgingly). They may not exactly embrace the other's philosophy, but they forge a bond that feels real.

I may have seen Sage in one too many Hal Hartley films because I have a tough time buying him in this role. His soft facial features give his moustache the appearance of being nothing more than a disguise used in an attempt to harden his demeanor. This makes his performance feel forced in spots, which is probably less a comment about the actor and more about my previous exposure to him. Whatever the case, it is a distraction.

Pierson throws in a few montages and some hand-held camera work, but mainly takes a static approach to the material. The mixture of styles effectively illustrates both the routine and extraordinary professional lives of these men. *EvenHand* most noticeably stumbles when it gets stuck in the same gear, and while there are contrasting tones at play, the narrative lacks a dynamic and can occasionally fail to make any substantial progress.

The film certainly could have had a more streamlined story and operated with a greater sense of urgency, but there is no denying the strengths of the piece. It's solid in the three major categories (direction, writing, acting), which is more often than not the indication of a good movie -- and that's ultimately the best description of *EvenHand*.

(Screened at the 2002 AFI Film Festival)