

LAST CAB TO DARWIN

A film by Jeremy Sims

123 min / English / 2016 / Color / Australia / Digital (DCP and Blu-ray)



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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Synopsis

Rex, a Broken Hill cab driver, has spent his life avoiding getting close to people. Even his best friend and occasional lover Polly, who lives across the road, is kept at distance. One day, he discovers he is dying. He doesn't want to be forced to rely on anyone, least of all Polly, so he decides to leave his home and drive alone the 3000kms across the continent to Darwin, where the recently passed euthanasia laws lead him to believe he can be in control of his own death. But on this epic journey he meets people who force him to re-evaluate his life. He begins to realize that a life not shared is a life not lived. Sadly it seems wisdom has come too late, until Polly finally gives Rex the courage to act. Against all the odds, in one final heroic act of pure will, he drives his cab back through time and distance to Broken Hill, where he will share what he has left of his life with the one he loves.

Filmmaker Biography

Jeremy Sims (born in 1966) works as an actor, director, writer and producer across theatre, film and television. Jeremy has had a successful and acclaimed career as an actor, working in film (he received an AFI award 'Best Actor' nomination for *Idiot Box*), on television (he has several Logie and AFI 'Best Actor' nominations, winning for *Aftershocks* in 1996) and on stage, where his reputation as one of Australia's great actors has been built playing roles like *Cyrano De Bergerac* and *Hamlet* to national acclaim. He regularly directs for Australia's flagship theatre producer - The Sydney Theatre Company - and has played on Broadway (*The White Devil*) and the West End (*Riflemind*, directed by Phillip Seymour Hoffman) for the STC.

He has been Artistic Director of his own Pork Chop Productions since 1995 and has directed and produced acclaimed classical interpretations and original theatrical works all around the country. Over the last decade Jeremy has focused on new Australian works, often in collaboration with long-time friend Reg Cribb, enlisting the Sydney Opera House as a co-production partner. Their theatrical productions of *Last Cab to Darwin* and *Ruby's Last Dollar* (both starring Jacki Weaver) won many awards and toured nationally in 2004 and 2005.

Jeremy Sims' first feature film, *Last Train to Freo*, received three AFI Award nominations and five Film Critics Circle Award nominations in 2006. He directed and produced his second feature film, the WWI epic *Beneath Hill 60* in Townsville. *Beneath Hill 60* was nominated in 2010 for 12 AFI Awards, 5 IF Awards and 8 FCCA Awards, including Best Director and Best Film across all three award ceremonies. Jeremy was nominated for an Australian Director's Guild Award.

Beneath Hill 60 has been sold and won awards all over the world, including Best Picture at the Savannah Film Festival and Jeremy was awarded the Alfred P Sloan Feature prize at the Hamptons International Film Festival. Previous winners include Darren Aronofsky, Julian Shnabel and Michael Apted.

Last Cab to Darwin, which he directed and co-wrote with playwright and screenwriter Reg Cribb, is his third feature.

Cast Biographies

MICHAEL CATON (Rex)

Veteran actor and national treasure **Michael Caton** has acted in some of Australia's most successful cinematic, television and stage productions since his career began in 1969.

Michael has inhabited some of the most beloved and iconic characters of the Australian screen. He became a household name in the '70s when he established the popular character of Harry Sullivan in *The Sullivans*, a role for which he won two Logie Awards.

His portrayal of Darryl Kerrigan in *The Castle* is not only a seminal work in the Caton canon but has added to the Australian phrase book with gems such as "This is going straight to the pool room."

Michael also appeared in cult '70s series such as *Homicide* and *Cop Shop*, as well as a string of successful stage plays and musicals including *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Other television credits include *Stingers*, *The Flying Doctors*, *The Les Darcy Story*, *Great Expectations*, *Blue Heelers*, *All Saints*, *Wildside* and *A Country Practice*, as well as the mini-series *Never Tell Me Never*, *Shadows of the Heart* and *Come in Spinner*.

His lead role in the film *Strange Bedfellows*, opposite Paul Hogan, won him the SMH Star of the Year Award in 2004.

Michael hosted the Seven Network's longrunning series *Hot Property*, which followed the fortunes of renters, buyers and builders negotiating the challenges of the real estate game and created another iconic character in Seven's much-loved award-winning drama series *Packed to the Rafters*.

He also starred in *Priscilla Queen of the Desert – The Musical* as Bob the mechanic, the role made famous in the hit film by Bill Hunter.

At the 2014 Australian International Movie Convention, Michael Caton was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Association of Cinema Operators Australasia for his distinguished career and contribution to the industry.

JACKI WEAVER (Dr. Farmer)

Jacki Weaver is an Australian theater, film and television actress well known in her home country for more than 50 years. She is best known outside Australia for her performance in David Michôd's *Animal Kingdom* (2010), for which she was nominated for the 2011 Academy Award® for Best Supporting Actress. She also received a National Board of Review Award, her third Australian Film Institute Award and a Golden Globe® nomination for Best Supporting Actress in a Drama.

Most recently, Weaver received an Oscar® nomination for Best Supporting Actress in David O. Russell's *The Silver Linings Playbook*, co-starring alongside Jennifer Lawrence, Bradley Cooper and Robert De Niro.

Up next for the actress is the raucous television comedy *Blunt Talk*, in which Jacki will star with Sir Patrick Stewart. Also on the film horizon are the futuristic love story *Equals*, opposite Kristen Stewart and Nicholas Hoult, crime-drama *The Voices*, co-starring Anna Kendrick and Ryan Reynolds; drama *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks*, co-starring Gena Rowlands and Julian Sands; and *Haunt*, an indie horror film.

Weaver made her Hollywood debut with the comedy *The Five-Year Engagement*, alongside Emily Blunt and Jason Segel. She then went on to co-star in Park Chan-Wook's English language debut *Stoker*, alongside fellow Australian actors Nicole Kidman and Mia Wasikowska.

Weaver's film debut came with 1971's *Stork*, for which she won her first Australian Film Institute Award. In the 1970s, Weaver gained a sex symbol reputation thanks to her sizzling performances in the likes of *Alvin Purple* (1973). Other notable films during this time include Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), often seen as one of Australia's greatest films, and *Caddie* (1976), for which she won her second Australian Film Institute Award.

Weaver's extensive television experience includes two situation comedy series written especially for her, *Trial by Marriage* and *House Rules*. She has starred in more than 100 plays in Australian theatre. She starred in iconic plays *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, *Death of a Salesman* and most recently, a Sydney stage production of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, alongside Cate Blanchett. The production received so much praise that the cast reprised their roles for a run at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and then again for the 2012 Lincoln Center Festival in New York City. She has recently starred in Woody Allen's latest film *Magic in the Moonlight* with Colin Firth and Emma Stone in the French Riviera. Weaver resides in Sydney, Australia and Los Angeles, California.

VARIETY

It's not so much the destination but the physical and emotional journey embarked on in this thoughtful, culturally authentic road trip.

Eddie Cockrell

There is a certain kind of film, rare in the best of times, that exudes a distinct creative concentration, a precisely measured marinade of character and story that suggests an extended gestation period of forethought and planning. Bill Pohlad's "Love & Mercy" is such a film, and so is George Miller's "Mad Max: Fury Road." Harnessing the intimate scale of the former and the root cultural vibe of the latter (minus the extreme speed and transplanted location), co-writer and director Jeremy Sims' "Last Cab to Darwin" tells the moving tale of a dying taxi driver and his cross-country quest to receive the voluntary euthanasia process enacted for a brief period of time in a single Australian state in the mid-1990s (it is now illegal across the land). Fests will line up at the rank to hail this "Cab," with older-skewing theatrical success a fare bet.

An aging hometown loner who's driven a taxi for most of his adult life, Rex Macrae (Michael Caton) lives alone with his vinyl records in the shadow of the mines that are the lifeblood of Broken Hill. Six hundred eighty-four miles west of Sydney and hard on the border of South Australia, the picturesque town is also, tangentially, a stone's throw from the sites used for "Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior." Rex's circle of mates is miniscule, composed primarily of three "tradies," or tradesmen (veteran character actors David Field, John Howard and Alan Dukes), with whom he gets routinely but somehow unenthusiastically pissed at the local pub. And then there's Polly (Ningali Lawford-Wolf), Rex's indigenous neighbour directly across the street. Though the two are initially abrasive with one another, it's quickly revealed that they are longtime occasional lovers who surreptitiously hold hands on the front veranda whilst sipping beers.

At about the same time he learns his stomach cancer leaves him a limited time to live, he hears a Dr. Farmer (Jacki Weaver) on the radio tell of a voluntary euthanasia program she's attempting to have legalized for trials. Thinking he'll end his days on his own terms, Rex decides to find the medico without telling anyone. Problem is, Farmer's in the Northern Territory capital of Darwin, some 1,900 miles driving distance due north — and Rex has never been out of Broken Hill.

So off he goes, leaving his house to an upset but resolute Polly, who promptly fills it with her own extended family. Along the way, he picks up the smart but rudderless young indigenous drifter Tilly (Mark Coles Smith) and English nurse-turned-backpacker Julie (Emma Hamilton). Their adventures together, as well as what Rex learns from Dr. Farmer, the legal system and his own heart, lead him to a decision that surprises even himself.

As much about an expiring way of life as the controversial decision of a terminally ill man, the film also raises thoughtfully contemporary — and in Australia, particularly provocative — questions about the nature of mateship, community and friendship in an unforced, organic way that belies the film's

longtime roots as a stage play. That work, in turn, sprung from a true-life tale that is more or less replicated here.

Wisely, director Sims and original scenarist Cribb decided the story cried out for authentic locations. Thus, Reg — and the curious viewer — are treated to the natural beauty, extraordinary isolation and rural lifestyles of such bush towns and locations as Marree, William Creek, Oodnadatta, Alice Springs, Daly Waters and others along the route.

The material was conceived with veterans Caton (“The Castle”), original stage cast member Weaver and Lawford-Wolf (“Rabbit-Proof Fence”) in mind, and their performances are never less than note-perfect. Smith and Hamilton are fine, and Brendan Cowell, an actor-writer-director in his own right, can be glimpsed briefly as an outback publican (Cowell returned the favour by casting Sims as an ad agency boss in his new film “Ruben Guthrie,” which also screened at the Sydney Film Festival). The modest-sized crew, led by d.p. Steve Arnold (“Disgrace”) creates a solid tech package that owes a confessed debt to placid yet pungent 1970s-era character studies. The guitar score by Ed Kuepper, founder of legendary punk combo the Saints, is quietly evocative even as it avoids twangy cliché.

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

Director Jeremy Sims follows up 'Beneath Hill 60' with a road movie about a death drive across the outback.

Harry Windsor

Offering oneself has never been more winning than it is in *Last Cab to Darwin*, director **Jeremy Sims'** (*Beneath Hill 60*) wryly comic tale of a grizzled taxi driver dying of cancer who drives from Broken Hill to Darwin — roughly Tennessee to Montana — in order to legally end his life via lethal injection. Adapted from **Reg Cribb's** stage play of the same name, the film shows little trace of its theatrical origins, not least because it consists of one ravishing shot of the blood-orange outback after another, and Sims wrings gentle pleasures from this most unlikely of subjects.

Michael Caton (beloved on these shores for his role in *The Castle*, an early showcase for the comic chops, since largely dormant, of **Eric Bana**) stars as Rex, who's never left the mining town of Broken Hill. When he's not picking up fares he spends his time draining schooners with his best mates — Simmo (**John Howard**), Col (**Alan Dukes**) and Dougie (**David Field**) — whose cheerful toast says it all: "Here's to us, f--- the rest." Then there's Polly (**Ningali Lawford-Wolf**, wonderfully irascible), the aboriginal woman who lives across the road and occasionally shares his bed. Rex's dog, Dog, looks on contentedly as the pair hold hands over a morning cuppa on the porch, though Rex pulls his hand away quickly when his neighbor emerges from next door.

Unbeknownst to his pals and Polly, Rex has three months to live. His diagnosis happily coincides, in the way of these things, with Dougie's discovery of a newspaper article about the legalization of euthanasia in the Territory — "they did that in Broken Hill there'd be no bastards left!," says Dougie. Rex promptly decides to jump in his taxi and drive straight across the desert to the clinic run by Dr. Farmer (**Jacki Weaver** with a black helmet of hair). He interrupts a radio interview she's conducting to tell her he's on his way. She tells him to keep his fluids up, so Rex buys a six-pack and sets off.

Sims and playwright Cribb (who also wrote Sims' debut feature, *Last Train to Freo*) fashioned their story out of two real ones from the 90's. *Last Cab* seems to be set then, too; the only time we see a mobile phone is in the hands of a young FIFO miner in the back of Rex's cab, who complains about his lack of reception and is given appropriately short shrift from Rex. Caton is an endearingly unpretentious star: with his formidable beer belly and dry, laconic mien, expect **Robert Duvall** in the remake.

After his windscreen is smashed, Rex pulls off the road alongside Tilly (**Mark Coles Smith**), an indigenous man with a cowboy hat, a million-dollar smile and endless swagger — all hips and dimples, a dead ringer for **Brad Pitt's** hustler in *Thelma and Louise*. Coles Smith is superb as the charming Tilly, whose front masks gnawing disappointment. They're joined on this cross-country jamboree by Julie (**Emma Hamilton**, BBC's *The Musketeers*), a nurse from London moonlighting as a barmaid in the outback, who quits to take care of Rex.

Inevitably the trek is episodic, but **Steve Arnold's** dusky photography and the good-natured sniping between the monosyllabic Rex and the motormouth Tilly keep it buoyant. Once they've arrived at Dr. Farmer's clinic, though, the characters (and the film) find themselves in a holding pattern. Farmer sets about gathering the checks they need to proceed: principally, a signature from a psychiatrist signing off on Rex's soundness of mind. After all that forward movement, Rex and co. must sit and wait, amid much phone slamming from Weaver.

Last Cab to Darwin is no polemic, but its attitude towards euthanasia is oblique, chiefly because Farmer, the euthanasia advocate, is so unsympathetic. Weaver's glassy-eyed stare, so effective in *Animal Kingdom*, is present here, too; so convincing on a gangster matriarch, it seems a curious fit for a right-to-die campaigner. Increasingly the film positions Farmer as a grasper, out to advance her cause but with little concern for Rex. As he says himself: "Why do I get the feeling that woman wants me dead?" The film never becomes morbid, though, which is both its strength and weakness. The real man on which Rex is partially based had to wear a catheter and couldn't embrace another person without risking injury. Rex endures no ugly side effects — it's not that kind of film. Without them, though, his reason for ending his life prematurely is less obvious. And of course that's the idea, paving the way for Rex's eleventh-hour realization of who and what really matters. **Ed Kuepper's** guitar-heavy score sees out the sun, and is perhaps a touch over-present in a film that in most other departments exhibits an admirably light touch.

Selected Credits

Written by **Reg Cribb and Jeremy Sims**

Adapted from the stageplay written by **Reg Cribb**

Produced by **Greg Duffy, Lisa Duff, Jeremy Sims**

Directed by **Jeremy Sims**

CAST

Michael Caton (Rex)

Jacki Weaver (Dr. Farmer)

Ningali Lawford-Wolf (Polly)

Emma Hamilton (Julie)

Mark Coles Smith (Tilly)

Casting Director: **Kirsty McGregor**

Costume Designer: **Jane Johnston**

Music: **Ed Kuepper**

Sound Designer: **Simon Lister**

Editor: **Marcus D'Arcy**

Production Designer: **Clayton Jauncey**

Director of Photography: **Steve Arnold ACS**

Executive Producers: **Ned Lander, Edward Simpson, Andrew Myer, Ian Darling, Mark Nelson, Chris Cuffe, Natasha Cuffe, Prue MacLeod, Jon Adgemis, Michael Burton;**