

Murphy's Romance

US : 1985 : dir. Martin Ritt : Columbia / Martin Ritt - Fogwood : 107 min
 prod: Laura Ziskin : scr: Irving Ravetch & Harriet Frank Jr : dir.ph.: William A Fraker
 Corey Haim
 Sally Field; James Garner; Brian Kerwin; Dennis Burkley; Georgann Johnson; Charles Lane;
 Dortha Duckworth; Michael Prokopuk; Billy Ray Sharkey; Michael Crabtree

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	€	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Divorcée (with 12-year old son) makes fresh start in small Arizona community, where she's attracted to older, laid-back, widowed pharmacist – and vice versa. Charming, easy-going comedy written by Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank Jr. (from Max Schott's novella), with Garner in a standout performance as Murphy, the last of the rugged individualists. In fact, this earned him his first Oscar nomination. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie translation of the above:

"Young divorced woman (with son of 12) begins a new life in a small town in Arizona. She feels something for an older pharmacist and he for her. Charming, relaxed comedy written by Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank Jr (from a novella by Max Schott) in which Cramer gives a splendid performance of a hard-bitten individualist. He has this to thank for his first Oscar nomination. *** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review

"A divorcée determined to make a living as a horse-trainer in rural Arizona falls for the ageing local chemist. Well-meaning but somewhat yawnworthy romantic comedy-drama which might almost have strayed from the days of the Hardy family. Academy Award nominations: James Garner; Best Photography."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Enchanting May-December romance, with Field as a single woman starting a new life with her son in the Southwest, and then running into the crustily likeable Garner and her devious ex-husband. Director Ritt develops things at his usual leisurely pace, getting nice unassuming performances out of his stars along the way. *** "

Rating the Movies review:

"Winning, believable performances by Field and Garner grace this refreshing romantic comedy that focuses on the old-fashioned value of self-reliance. Field plays a recent divorcée determined to make a new start in a small Arizona town. Garner is the local pharmacist who wins her heart. Kerwin is excellent as Field's shiftless ex-husband. Martin Ritt's direction brings out the warmth and humanity of this insightful story. Also with Corey Haim. Academy Award nomination – Garner, Best Actor *** "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"The bridge drives and soda fountains of picturesque small-town Arizona offer interminable pretexts for meetings cute and heartwarming romance between Field's divorced mum and Garner's corner-store pharmacist who dispenses homespun advice along with his prescriptions. From the same writer/director/star team responsible for "NORMA RAE", this cornball comedy comes on more as a depressing barometer of contemporary Hollywood. Boo to Field's ex-

husband (Kerwin), a no-good boyo who roars into town on an "**EASY RIDER**" bike, strums '60s folk songs, enjoys "**FRIDAY THE 13TH**". Hooray for Murphy (Garner) with his purse-lipped work ethic, blue grass fiddle, and solid old jalopy (adorned with no-nukes stickers as a token nod to liberalism). Field ploughs her now over-familiar furrow of plucky independence, and it's only the abrasive charm of Garner and Kerwin that redeems the film from terminal whimsy."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"There's an old-fashioned haze to this Arizona romance that provides James Garner with his most "character-full" leading role in a long while, and won him an Oscar nomination. Sally Field plays another of her now-familiar gutsy women of the outdoors as the divorcee who heads west to start a horse-training ranch (and a new life) with her 12-year old son. She's befriended by widower Garner and has trouble with her ex-husband. It all works well enough, with Garner's laid-back charm making you wonder why the cinema always allowed him to slip back to the small screen. There's a nice running gag, too, about him refusing to reveal his age and the dialogue provides a few more warm chuckles along similar lines. *** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Director Martin Ritt has just the right touch to keep "**MURPHY'S ROMANCE**", a fairly predictable love story, from lapsing into gushy sentimentality of clichés. Unfortunately, this sweet and homey picture which casts two very decent actors (Sally Field and James Garner) in two very decent roles, falls far short of compelling film-making.

Field plays a divorced mother who is determined to make a living as a horse-trainer on a desolate piece of property on the outskirts of a one-street town in rural Arizona. On practically her first day in the area she meets Murphy, a widower who is the town's pharmacist and local good guy. He takes a liking to her almost immediately, but it isn't much later until her ne'er-do-well former husband, Brian Kerwin, rides back into her life.

What unfolds is how the Field, Garner and Kerwin triangle is resolved with Field leaning toward Garner the whole time."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"This sweet little love story also marks the finest performance given on film by James Garner. He's a crusty small-town pharmacist, a widower with no shortage of home-cooked meals but little interest in anything more permanent. Garner and Sally Field are great together, and the result is a complete charmer. **** "

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"In an age in which screen romance inevitably means teenagers in various states of undress, "**MURPHY'S ROMANCE**" is a welcome relief, a warm – if not entirely successful – portrait of two people falling in love. Emma Moriarty (Sally Field) is a divorced woman who moves with 13-year old son Jake (Corey Haim) to a ranch on the outskirts of a rural Arizona town where she hopes to start her own horse-training business. When Emma meets the town pharmacist, Murphy Jones (James Garner), the two gradually build a comfortable friendship until she is unhappily surprised by a visit from her irresponsible ex-husband, Bobby Jack (Brian Kerwin). As Bobby Jack becomes increasingly annoying to Emma, she finds herself turning more and more to Murphy.

"**MURPHY'S ROMANCE**" builds the friendship between Field and Garner in a slow and wholly natural manner, a refreshing change from the "instant" love stories that abound in modern cinema. Garner's performance is thoroughly likable and earned him a well-deserved Oscar nomination. Field, though she gives a spirited performance, is not entirely believable. Director Martin Ritt and screenwriters Harriet Frank Jr and Irving Ravetch rely too heavily on little vignette sequences to move the narrative, a technique that quickly becomes tedious and predictable. William Fraker also received an Oscar nomination for his cinematography. **½ "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Films of the Eighties" or "The Good Film and Video Guide"]

Radio Times review:

“Six years after she won the Best Actress Oscar for "**NORMA RAE**", Sally Field teamed up with director Martin Ritt again for this easy-going comedy about a May to December-style romance. An ambitious horse trainer, who has recently moved into a small Arizona community, finds herself attracted to a widower pharmacist. The result? Field's rugged love interest, twinkle-eyed James Garner, gained a first time Oscar nomination. Quite why is a question you'll keep asking because, while eager to please, it's flimsy stuff, lacking the usually unsentimental Ritt hard edge. *** ”

“Love story, the first in a double bill starring James Garner, with Sally Field. Emma Moriarty, divorced and determined, makes a fresh start on an Arizona ranch and find herself juggling the affections of the three males in her

life: her son, her ex-husband and the genial town pharmacist, Murphy Jones.”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Corey Haim:

“Corey Haim was a strong, serious, sensitive boy with a face the camera loved. His career began in Canada, in a TV series called "**The Edison Twins**". He then moved down to the USA, and had particularly rewarding leads in "**SILVER BULLET**" and "**LUCAS**". Corey's later films included "**THE LOST BOYS**" (87), "**LICENSE TO DRIVE**" (88) and "**PRAYER OF THE ROLLERBOYS**" (90). He was also in the TV series "**Roomies**".”

Hmm, well presumably, amid the longeurs and leisurely pacing, there is space for the unmentioned Corey Haim to grab a scene or two, and he is the only reason the film is included here. Age 13, he starred the same year as a paraplegic boy in the silly Stephen King werewolf film "**THE SILVER BULLET**", and as a son dying with dignity in the superior TV movie "**A TIME TO LIVE**", in which Lisa Minnelli made her television debut as his mother. Haim was a personable and talented boy with a useful everyman quality, so more's the pity that better opportunities didn't come his way. In his late teens he starred in a long line of no-brain teen market comedies, frequently with off-screen friend Corey Feldman, but sun-tanned youths with good teeth and complexions are ten a penny in Hollywood, and he has yet to find a role to re-establish himself as a serious young adult actor in the Leonardo DiCaprio class.

See also Sally Field's similar "**PLACES IN THE HEART**", and subject index under **FARMS & FARMING** and **HORSES & PONIES**.