

# The Electric Horseman

**AFI** Pollack, Sydney (director), 1979. Rastar Films; Wildwood Enterprises.

## Synopsis [Translate](#)

Former rodeo world champion, Sonny Steele, has traded competition for advertising as the national spokesman for Ranch breakfast cereal and he tours the country in a jeweled cowboy costume, braided with flashing lights. However, his manager, Wendell, and assistant, Leroy, struggle to keep Sonny sober, and the global conglomerate, AMPCO Industries, who hired Sonny, is increasingly disappointed in his performance. In Las Vegas, Nevada, a television newscaster from New York City, named Hallie Martin, arrives for an AMPCO media event and is curious why the company discourages interviews with the cowboy. During rehearsals for the AMPCO variety show at Caesars Palace, Sonny notices that Rising Star, the \$12 million champion racehorse he will be riding on stage and the company's new corporate symbol, has been drugged with tranquilizers. He barges into the sales reception and complains to AMPCO's chairman, Hunt Sears, that the thoroughbred stallion is being exploited, but Sears reminds Sonny about his generous contract and walks away. When Sonny arrives backstage for his act that evening, he mounts Rising Star and goes on stage in the middle of a disco musical number as the director screams for him to stop. Tipping his hat to the audience, Sonny carefully rides the horse down the runway, out of the nightclub and through the casino. After trotting down the Las Vegas strip, Sonny and Rising Star gallop out of town. In the aftermath of the incident, AMPCO executives are desperate to locate Sonny before the press does, worried that the cowboy might raise concerns about the company's treatment of the horse, which could jeopardize an upcoming \$300 million merger. At a press conference, they announce that Sonny is facing grand larceny charges. Meanwhile, in the Nevada desert, Sonny borrows a camper van from his friend Gus Atwater and drives to Utah with Rising Star. Along the way, he begins to detoxify the stallion and treat the animal's swollen tendon. Back at the casino, Hallie investigates Sonny's whereabouts. After piecing together clues from Leroy and Wendell, Hallie tracks down Gus and cajoles him into revealing Sonny's location. Sonny is angry when Hallie finds his campsite, so he

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| Location | St. George Utah United States; Las Vegas Nevada United States; Snow Canyon Utah United States; Ivins Reservoir Utah United States |
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| Company | Rastar Films; Columbia Pictures; Wildwood Enterprises |
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|-------|-----------------------|
| Title | The Electric Horseman |
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| Production title | The Electric Horseman |
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| Director | Pollack, Sydney |
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| Producer | Stark, Ray |
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|                    |                                    |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Production company | Rastar Films; Wildwood Enterprises |
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| Cast | Name                             | Role            |
|------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
|      | <a href="#">Redford, Robert</a>  | Sonny [Steele]  |
|      | <a href="#">Fonda, Jane</a>      | Hallie [Martin] |
|      | Co-starring:                     |                 |
|      | <a href="#">Perrine, Valerie</a> | Charlotta       |
|      | <a href="#">Saxon, John</a>      | Hunt Sears      |

**Credits**

| Name               | Credit                              |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Schwary, Ronald L. | Associate production                |
| Schwary, Ronald L. | Production manager                  |
| Moore, M. Michael  | Assistant director                  |
| Roe, Bart          | 2d assistant director               |
| Kittleson, John    | 2d assistant director; [Uncredited] |
| Goodwin, Hope      | DGA trainee; [Uncredited]           |
| Garland, Robert    | Screenplay                          |
| Gaer, Paul         | Screenplay story                    |
| Garland, Robert    | Screenplay story                    |
| Burton, Shelly     | Based on a story by                 |
| Columbia Pictures  | Distribution company                |
| Roizman, Owen      | Director of photography             |

**Physical description**

Sound; Color; Lenses/Prints: Lenses and Panaflex camera by Panavision®

**Production details**

Production Qualifiers: Universal Pictures and Columbia Pictures Present; A Ray Stark-Wildwood Production; A Sydney Pollack Film

Premier Information: Los Angeles and New York openings: 21 Dec 1979

Production Dates: began 1 Nov 1978 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Copyright Information: Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. & Universal City Studios, Inc. 7 January 1980 PA54238

Duration: 120 min.

MPAA Certification: PG

PCA Certificate: 25724

Songs: "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up And Be Cowboys," music by Ed Bruce and Patsy Bruce; "Midnight Rider," music by Gregory L. Allman; "Hands On The Wheel," music by William M. Callery.

Document note

End credits include the following written statement: "We would like to thank the management and staff of Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas for their assistance and co-operation."

As described in a 24 Dec 1978 *LAT* article, the story originated with writer Shelly Burton in the early 1970s. Director Sydney Pollack and actor Robert Redford were approached early on, but were involved in other commitments. While the project was being developed at Columbia Pictures under producer Ray Stark, Martin Ritt was announced as director, according to a 11 Mar 1977 *HR* news item. After Pollack and Redford abandoned a film based on the Robert Penn Warren book, *A Place To Come To*, they returned to *The Electric Horseman*, which represented their fifth collaboration as director and actor.

Production notes in AMPAS library files stated that the project was Redford's first feature following a three-year hiatus from acting.

Robert Garland received final screenplay credit and shared screen story credit with Paul Gaer, but sources indicate that other writers contributed, although none are credited onscreen. A 27 Mar 1978 *LAT* article noted that Carol Sobieski rewrote an earlier script by Gaer and Walter Bernstein, and the 24 Dec 1978 *LAT* article referred to Alvin Sargent as revising the screenplay during production. In a 4 Jan 1980 *NYT* article, Pollack stated that, in early

Studio executives were disappointed in the first week box-office results, which were just under \$6.5 million, according to the 31 Dec 1979 *DV*. However, in the following weeks, the box-office outlook brightened and the picture became "the word-of-mouth film of the [holiday] season," as described in the *Village Voice* column. After fourteen weeks in national release, the film had grossed over \$50 million and was considered a blockbuster hit, according to briefs in the 13 Feb 1980 *HR* and the 1 Apr 1980 *DV*.

The film received Academy Award nominations for Arthur Piantadosi, Les Fresholtz, Michael Minkler and Al Overton, Jr. in the category of Sound.

Editorial information

Viewed by AFI

Supplemental data

Box Office, 28 Jul 1980, p. 1, 11.

Daily Variety, 13 Sep 1978.

Daily Variety, 1 Dec 1978, p. 14, 16.

Daily Variety, 31 Dec 1979.

Daily Variety, 29 Jan 1980, p. 1, 65.

Daily Variety, 1 Apr 1980.

Hollywood Reporter, 11 Mar 1977.

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