

## ZOO

ZOO, the controversial new documentary about stallions and the men who love them (and not in that Disney, MY FRIEND FLICKA sort of way) takes an unpalatable story and transforms it into a fable that is as pretty as it is boring.

ZOO's most salacious details are already familiar: in 2005, a 45-year-old man, later identified as a Boeing engineer with a high security clearance, died of a perforated colon in rural Washington. While investigating his death, local police discovered videotapes of the man engaging in a sexual act with a horse.

Further investigation led the officers to a local farm employee who was using his boss' stables as a party destination for "zoophiles," a community of men who engage in sexual activities with animals. These men would gather at the property, kick back, have a few drinks, a couple laughs, and then they, you know, would do it with a horse. CNN got wind, and the story quickly exploded across the national press. At the time, bestiality was not illegal in the state of Washington, and so the men involved were not charged with any crime. But it didn't matter: they had already been exposed, their lives ruined.

ZOO is structured around three extended interviews with the zoophiles involved, all of whom remain unidentified. In these interviews, the men explain that they love animals because animals live in a simple world free of judgment. They describe having sex with horses as a deeply spiritual experience. Most of what they have to say is surprisingly unsurprising: their descriptions of transcendent experiences could be overheard at the social hour of any New Age bookstore.

The beauty of the reenactments that accompany the interviews has been written about ad nauseum in the press. And yes, the 16mm footage of rural Washington, blackberries and horses is pretty, but no more so than the average car commercial. How the filmmakers expect to tear the moral fabric of society using its least challenging aesthetic is a question only they can answer.

ZOO is provocative exactly one time. When the owners of the horse farm screen their employee's footage of a "zoo" event, there is video of an actual act of bestiality in the corner of the screen for about one second. For about a minute, you can hear it, and the noise of man and horse is both primal and disturbing.

For a brief moment, there is tension between who the men think they are and who they may really be. But the film quickly moves on to the far more compelling idea that horses are pretty. ZOO prides itself on pushing the limits of acceptability, but it has much more in common with mainstream entertainment than the filmmakers probably acknowledge: like most movies, it takes something that's kind of ugly and glamorizes it, making it easier to consume.