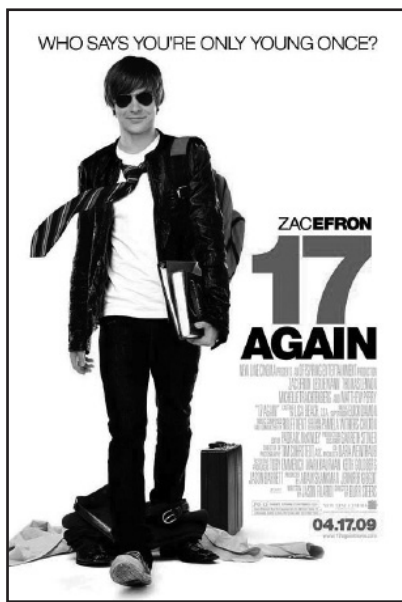


## Entertainment



### 17 AGAIN

An unhappy 37-year-old husband is magically rewound back to the age of 17 where he tries to reconnect with his estranged wife and teenage kids. Comedy/PG-13.

Back in 1989, Mike O'Donnell (Zac Efron) was the star basketball player at Hayden High School. But when he learned that his girlfriend, Scarlett (Allison Miller), was pregnant, he decided to give up his dreams and marry her instead. Now, 20 years later, Mike (Matthew Perry) isn't happy with any part of his life.

Beyond being passed over for a promotion at work, Scarlett (Leslie Mann) has filed for a divorce that will be complete in a few weeks, while his teenage kids, Maggie (Michelle Trachtenberg) and Alex (Sterling Knight), don't want much to do with him either. Accordingly, he's been staying with his friend, Ned Gold (Thomas Lennon), who might be just as nerdy as he was back in high school, but now is an ultra-rich software developer.

While trying to connect with his kids who attend his old school, Mike has a meeting with an old janitor who somehow causes the unhappy man to be transported through a vortex where he comes out still in the present day, but back in his former 17-year-old body. After getting over that shock, he and Ned come up with the idea that Mike will pose as Mark, Ned's son and a new student at Hayden High.

While Ned tries to hit on Principal Jane Masterson (Melora Hardin), Mike tries to help Maggie and Alex who obviously don't recognize them. That's complicated by the fact that school bully Stan (Hunter Parrish) routinely torments Alex but is also Maggie's bad-boy boyfriend. By befriending Alex, Matt then meets Scarlett who's shaken by his appearance, but thinks nothing more of that. From that point on, and while trying to help out his kids, Matt tries to reconnect with Scarlett and stop her from going through with the divorce.

Our Take: 5 out of 10

Ask most people and they'll tell you that their high school years were not the best time of their lives. That is, except for many of the jocks, cheerleaders, bullies and others who held some sort of sway over the masses of students. Yet, thanks to the great equalizer that time always turns out to be, the most popular kids in school often end up peaking then, with nowhere but downhill to go, while the unpopular, geeky or awkward ones latter blossomed in one way or another.

Accordingly, while many are oft to say "If I only knew then what I know now," few would accept the chance to return to those years, even if armed with such knowledge and a better chance of putting the elitist poseurs in their place, winning the girl of guy of their dreams, or anything hindsight related.

Thirty-seven-year-old Mike O'Donnell (Matthew Perry), whose glory days are long behind him, stuck in memories of what could have been during his height in high school, doesn't have the choice. And that's because as if often the case in fantastical storytelling, a narrative device -- this time a swirling

vortex of some undetermined sort -- gives him the proverbial second chance to make things right.

Yet, rather than ending up back in the actual years of his original high school days armed with an adult mindset as happened to Kathleen Turner's character in "Peggy Sue Got Married," Mike ends up back in his previous 17-year-old body but in the present day in "17 Again."

Yet another in a long line of "body switching" movies ("Big," "13 Going on 30," yada-yada-yada), this one is about as formulaic as they come. Even so, the cast and crew manage to eke enough humor, charm and cuteness from the recycled material that it turns out to be a moderately entertaining diversion (but nothing more).

Rather than have Perry trying to play 17 (which was one of the problems with watching Turner try to do something similar in "PSGM"), director Burr Steers opted for the smart marketing choice and nabbed teen heartthrob Zac Efron to do the heavy lifting (or ticket selling, if you will, should his "High School Musical" fans follow him over to a rival school setting).

The "twist" here -- concocted by screenwriter Jason Filardi -- is that our middle-aged protagonist in his former younger self ends up at the same high school attended by his teenage daughter (Michelle Trachtenberg) and son (Sterling Knight). And considering the early scenes set up the plot point revolving around his wife (Leslie Mann) waiting for their divorce to be finalized, you know it's only a matter of time before he tries to make amends with her.

That might sound like it has the potential for some fun twists, turns and comically uncomfortable situations where Mike's family members don't realize it's him and thus do or say things they wouldn't otherwise dream of. Unfortunately, and for the most part, the filmmakers play it safe and don't strain themselves too much in terms of doing anything truly smart or creative with the material and built-in potential.

While viewer reaction will obviously vary, a running gag (that ultimately turns into a subplot of sorts) featuring Thomas Lennon as a geeky but ultra-rich, adult nerd and toy collector eventually started to wear out its welcome for yours truly. And that's mainly because we've seen this sort of character and situation countless times before (Steve Carrell nailed that sort of persona, sans the rich part, in "40-Year-Old Virgin").

The big comedy "surprise" surrounding his courtship of Melora Hardin's school principal character (who's initially uncomfortable around him) is not only predictable, but lifted from previous efforts, and thus lacks the zing it wants to deliver (although our preview audience seemed happily surprised by the all-too-obvious development).

As far as Efron carrying the picture, his effort is decent, with the filmmakers having him deliver some of his lines as Perry would (to make that same person connection), and there's no denying he has that highly desirable combination of being cute, charming and adorable (the latter put in there for all of his fans). He's certainly more fun to watch as that character than Perry is (although to be fair, the pic is designed that way), and there are moments when he hits the comedy notes just right.

At others, however, some of the material, situations and humor feel too artificially constructed and played (especially toward the beginning before the film gets its feet firmly planted and moves forward). The result is a pic that's moderately enjoyable, but suffers from being formulaic, not smart or creative enough, and too far down the long line of "body switching" flicks to have any semblance of novelty to it. Decent and earning points for being cute and delivering some decent occasional laughs, "17 Again" rates as a 5 out of 10. Courtesy of Screenit.com •

## Curbside



### SUZUKI EQUATOR RMZ-4

By Antony B. Barthel

The vehicle reviewed for this story was the 2009 Suzuki Equator RMZ-4 4X4 Mid-Size Pickup.

There is an old saying that "timing is everything." Certainly this is true in so many things such as drag racing, comedy and even vehicle design and production. So I was a bit curious when I noticed that Suzuki had introduced a mid-sized pickup truck right as the market for such vehicles has gone soft. After all, we've suddenly developed a taste for the type of smaller vehicles that have populated the Suzuki showrooms for years. What's the logic?

Simple. When you manufacture all sorts of recreational vehicles such as motorcycles, outboard motors, ATVs and more, it makes sense to make a vehicle that can haul those things to where the fun happens.

#### What's Hot

There are few differences between Suzuki's Equator and the Nissan Frontier, which are manufactured side by side in Nissan's plant in Smyrna, Tennessee. Both come with a choice of a 2.5-liter four or 4.0-liter V-6; five-speed manual or automatic transmissions (the Frontier adds the option of a six-speed manual); two-wheel drive or four-wheel drive with VDC, HDC, and Hill Start Assist; short or long bed; and extended cab or crew cab. Interior and exterior dimensions are nearly identical, but presumably because of the different front styling, the Suzuki is about an inch longer overall. The Equator provides the same towing and payload capacity as the Frontier, you can lug up to 6500 pounds of Suzuki's adventure gear.

Speaking of the power train, Nissan's excellent 4.0-liter V6 with 261 horsepower and 281 lb-ft of torque was outfitted to the test truck, mated to a five-speed automatic. This engine is responsive and powerful and is a good match for this truck.

The tested model was the RMZ-4 which includes an alphabet soup of electronic gadgetry designed to make your off-road experience less taxing including Bilstein shocks, skid plates, heavy-duty Dana 44 axles and meaty 265/75R16 tires. A special interior package also comes with the RMZ-4 model, which borrows its name from Suzuki's line of off-road bikes.

Ironically, I did have quite a bit of stuff to carry during the Equator's stay and we rolled down to the local big box store to pick up a mini fridge and all sorts of other stuff. By the time we got out of the store it was absolutely pouring rain, so we looked at the crew cab Suzuki and hoped it could swallow all this stuff. Sure enough!

The back seat in the truck not only can fold down

to hold cargo, but also can flip up as well, making the space very accommodating. The volume of stuff the truck could hold inside was pretty amazing.

On the outside, if we happened to have had any Suzuki (or other) dirt bikes or other off-highway fun machines the optional cargo channel lock system would have kept all those things in place. The optional spray-on bedliner, a smart choice, would have also kept the bed from scratching and rusting.

#### What's Not

The Suzuki Equator and Nissan Frontier are based on the same major platform that delivers the Nissan Titan. While that makes for a great, solid and hefty truck it does mean that this truck isn't that great with fuel economy. The government guesses 15 in the city, 20 on the highway, which can be bested by several full-size trucks including the best selling Ford F150. With all the incentives available on full-size trucks today, sometimes these are a better deal than mid-size trucks, which explains why the market for mid-size trucks is soft.

As a smaller automaker, Suzuki doesn't need high-volume sales to be a success. Gas prices have scared off a lot of would-be truck buyers, but if just enough people who once looked at full-size pickups turn to smaller models, Suzuki could benefit. This one provides towing capacity, interior room, and off-road capability, all with a seven-year/100,000-mile transferable power train warranty, which is better than that of the Frontier on which it's based.

#### In Summary

I have liked this generation of Nissan Frontier since I first saw it and I've already seen comments on the Internet from people who like Suzuki's exterior treatment better than Nissan's. Still, this truck has already earned a solid reputation as a Nissan and the Suzuki has won 4X4 Of The Year by Petersen's 4Wheel & Off Road magazine. Not a bad thing to happen right out of the gate.

With a lot of versatility and style, a reasonably pleasant interior with very comfortable seats and Suzuki's warranty there's good reason to surmise that Suzuki will do well with the Equator. After all, your dirt bikes and watercraft have to get to the fun zone some how. •

