



Jappeloup a dark horse for enjoyment

PIAF FILM

Jappeloup (PG)

Guillaume Canet, Daniel Auteuil, Marina Hands

DIRECTOR **CHRISTIAN DUGUAY**

REVIEW **MARK NAGLAZAS**

You'll like this if you liked National Velvet, Champions, Phar Lap, Seabiscuit, Secretariat



The last competition horse movie I saw was so lame — it was *The Cup* starring Stephen Curry as champion jockey Damien Oliver — I was tempted to break into the projection booth and put the poor sod out of its misery.

So you can understand my trepidation about *Jappeloup*, which tells the true-life tale of an undersized French horse that defied the odds to achieve legendary status in the world of showjumping.

Thankfully, *Jappeloup* is several lengths in front of *The Cup* in a crowded field of very good horse pictures — not quite up there with the magnificent *Seabiscuit*, which was also about an unlikely champion, but assured of having the audience cheering it on in the thrilling final moments.

What does distinguish *Jappeloup* from most movies dealing with horses in high levels of competition is that the actor who plays the eponymous equine's rider, Guillaume Canet, is an

accomplished showjumper and clearly did most of his own stunts.

Canet was born into a family of horse breeders and had planned on a career as a showjumper. He was so accomplished that he made it into the French junior team. A fall at the age of 18 ended those dreams and French cinema is richer for it.

So in both writing the screenplay and playing *Jappeloup*'s owner and rider, Pierre Durand, Canet brings an unusual level of realism to the tale, both in the way he handles the horse and in the details he brings to the training and competition scenes.

Ironically, Durand is Canet in reverse, turning his back on a promising career in the law to return to his first love, showjumping, and with his well-heeled horse aficionado father (Daniel Auteuil) buying the small but potentially great *Jappeloup*.

During training, it looks like horse and man are made for each other, with Pierre regaining the form that made him a junior champion and *Jappeloup* proving that size is no barrier to leaping the fences and walls.

However, when it comes to competition, things do not quite gel for Pierre and *Jappeloup*, with the hot-headed, win-at-all-costs owner-rider constantly clashing with officials and the equally prickly coach of the French national equestrian team (Tcheky Karyo).

And off the field, there are strains with his wife (Marina Hands), who is growing tired of Pierre's constant touring, and family tragedy, with his beloved father passing away.

Eventually, Pierre and *Jappeloup* overcome what seems like one mishap after another on the way to Seoul Olympics in 1988.

We're never sure of the outcome (I won't spoil it for those who don't know their equestrian history).

This is not a film of big dramatic gestures and soaring themes. However, it gently teases out the idea that Pierre must temper his drive for glory and forge a real bond with *Jappeloup*, which is really understood only by his young female groom, Raphaëlle Dalio.

Jappeloup is an unusual film to kick off this year's Perth International Arts Festival film season because it is so thoroughly mainstream.

But it moves smoothly out of the gate and across the finish line with a few well-earned tears along the way.

It's a nice start for the five-month season that will require stayers more than sprinters. **C**

Jappeloup is on at the Joondalup Pines each night at 8 from November 26-December 1 and the Somerville Auditorium from December 2-8.





HORSE SENSE Groom Raphaëlle (Lou de Laage) and Pierre (Guillaume Canet) in Jappeloup