

# Tom, Thanks for Turner & Hooch

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TURNER & HOOCH (1989)

Directed by Roger Spottiswoode

Written by Michael Blodgett & Dennis Shryack

Starring Craig T. Nelson, Mare Winningham, Beasley the dog, & Tom Hanks as Scott Turner

Look: It's totally fine if you're not an animal person. If you're knowingly not interested in associating with animals, that might not be a socially encouraged stance, but let it be said, you're safe with me. I happen to like 'em, but I admit I have my preferences. I've noticed a tend toward the universal obligation to coddle the very premise of dogs, to the extent that I'm vilified for rejecting a lungeing dog. Sorry. I like animals, but I like them on my terms. You know... I'm a cat-person. In my life I've lived with Louie, Dusty, Chloe, Mia, and Winston; all cats, all queens, perhaps you've heard of them. My love for those felines in particular has indeed given cats in general an edge in my favour, and I don't have much interest in ever owning a dog, but I feel no compulsion to harbour any resentment for dogs. So, why is it that so many self-proclaimed dog-people think it's required to dislike cats? Their precious canines aren't so cynical about it!

This week's TH movie has nothing to do with cats; cats just happen to be my way into the concept of loving an animal as family. I've never owned a dog, and I can appreciate one's resistance to accept a dog that's been thrust into their life. That's the reality for Scott Turner in 1989's Turner & Hooch. Turner works as a strictly by-the-book investigator, in a small town where nothing ever happens. When a local docksman is murdered, Turner takes on the case, and in spite of himself, also the victim's rowdy French Mastiff. The middle act of this film explicitly follows a formula with which we're all familiar; human & animal don't get along at first, both are messy and forlorn in different symbolic ways, and over time they come to love and need each other. Because of these cliches, I did not expect to be fully engrossed in the final thirty minutes of this movie. I'm talking about genuinely tense warehouse shootouts, betrayals, ugly cries. Turner & Hooch gets good.

The aesthetic of this film bares a decisive resemblance to that of Jaws, which you wouldn't expect, given it appears to be a schmaltzy family flick. But this likeness extends beyond just the sea-side millieu and the fact that it's about a cop. Turner & Hooch and Jaws are both films about the relationship of man to beast; they're both violent and investigative, and they both deal in the theme of natural instinct. But, yes, one is a schmaltzier family flick. To be clear, Turner & Hooch is a comedy, and it relies heavily on TH's evident clowning sensibility, as a lean thirty-three year old, wearing an equalizing pair of black briefs. He climbs through windows, he throws tantrums on the porch, and his dignity is reduced to bits by the torment of this unwelcome dog. To say nothing of the utter destruction Hooch brings upon Turner's home. If ever you've been irked by claw-marks on the hardwood or a pick in the leather sofa, you ain't seen nothing like this.

But hats off to Hooch for evoking such a visceral response. The film's two leads indeed have remarkable chemistry as foes on the road to friendship, and on the one hand, TH could have chemistry with literally anyone, but on the other, credit is due to both parties involved. This brings me to wonder, what are the all-time greatest film performances by animals (not including CGI, animation, puppetry, costumes, or animatronics)? Feel free to challenge me, but these are my choices:

10. Charlie, goldendoodle, A Star is Born (2018)
9. Mrs. Norris, Maine coon, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002)
8. Einstein, berger picard, Back to the Future (1985)
7. Seabiscuit, horse, Seabiscuit (2003)
6. Ulysses, red mackeral tabby, Inside Llewyn Davis (2013)
5. Richard Parker, Bengal tiger, Life of Pi (2012)
4. Shadow, golden retriever, Homeward Bound (1993)
3. Willy, killer whale, Free Willy (1993)
2. Toto, cairn terrier, The Wizard of Oz (1939)
1. Babe, pig, Babe (1995) \*Seriously, this performance is incredible. It's a pig that thinks he's a sheepdog. And I'm not even talking about the voice-over by Christine Cavanaugh. The 48 White Yorkshires featured on camera. The layers. The commitment. The nuance. That'll do, pig. Brava.\*

Please note there are no fewer than four dogs on this list, and we've established I lean heavily in the direction of cat-person. This is mighty big of me, I think. Can't see a dog-person doing the same with cats. Also note: I haven't included Hooch, who was finely portrayed by a pup named Beasley. Given time, I'm open to reconsideration, but I'm new to this movie and I need to let it sink in. Similarly, Brandy the pit bull in Once Upon a Time in Hollywood kills it (literally), but I'll give it some time.

Turner & Hooch is more than three decades old. Surely, it's outlasted the statute of limitations on spoilers. A bit of Chekov's Gun-style foreshadowing occurs when Turner's police colleagues initially consider shooting Hooch, and indeed one of the titular characters doesn't live to see the credits. And it's not Turner. This is a well-trodden path, in the tradition of animals movies, and if it's not handled carefully, it can read as an emotional exploitation. Most people who have loved a pet have had to say goodbye to a pet, and to be reminded of this is to be reminded of the assuredly heartbreaking relationship to which we knowingly submit. But this film has the ambition to then remind us that, beyond these hard times, we will always have more love to give. And I do accept that the animal thing isn't for everyone. But I'd encourage you to accept companionship in whatever unlikely way it may come; be it a cat, a dog, or someone else all together. Because we all deserve to be rescued... Unless you've got a problem with Babe, in which case, I can't help you.

Thx!