M4850 MR. RELIABLE A TRUE STORY (AUSTRALIA, 1996)

Credits: director, Nadia Tass; writers, Don Catchlove, Terry Hayes.

Cast: Colin Friels, Jacqueline McKenzie, Paul Sonkkila.

Summary: Comedy set in Sydney, Australia in 1968. Based on the improbable but true events surrounding Australia’s first hostage drama which unfolded in the hot summer of 1968 when opposition to the Vietnam War was triggering widespread hostility toward authority figures. Wally Mellish (Friels), just out of prison after serving time for stealing a car, is determined to make a fresh start and succeeds in renting a run-down shack in the dusty western suburbs of Sydney. He also finds himself a girl, Beryl Muddle (McKenzie), who agrees to move in with Wally along with her 2-year-old son. Almost immediately the not very bright Wally gets into trouble by stealing a couple of Jaguar hood ornaments to please Beryl. When a pair of police officers come to investigate, Wally, fearing another prison term, pulls a gun on them. The siege is on, with the authorities afraid to rush the house because of the presence of Beryl and the baby (whom they wrongly assume are being held against their will).

Meanwhile, the state police commissioner, Norm Allan (Sonkkila), is concerned about public relations in the wake of recent anti-war demonstrations in which the police beat up unarmed protesters. The resulting standoff becomes a media circus with an almost festive gathering of reporters and onlookers gathering around Wally’s house. Comic negotiations ensue. Wally and Beryl are married with Norm serving as best man.

Ultimately, Wally accepts a negotiated settlement: the police will not press charges if he enlists in the Army. When they arrive at the enlistment office, however, it turns out that Wally is illiterate. The Army will not take him, and he walks away a free man with the ironic comment that if he could read and write, they would have sent him to be killed in Vietnam.


