

# Comedy – ‘Planes, Trains and Automobiles Is John Candy (And Canadian Comedy) At Its Best

comedy

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### ‘Planes, Trains And Automobiles’ Is John Candy (And Canadian Comedy) At Its Best



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At first glance, there’s nothing distinctly Canadian about John Hughes’ 1987 road trip epic *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*. The movie takes place entirely within the United States (New York, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois, to be exact) and ends when Steve Martin’s Neal Page finally gets home to celebrate American Thanksgiving. The lesser of the two Thanksgivings, obviously.

But if you look a little closer, you’ll find that *Planes* has a bit of a Canadian connection, after all. The miserable, snowy weather through which Neal and his unintentional travel companion, Del, brave should look familiar to any Canadian north of...well, anywhere. At the beginning of the film, Del intently reads from *The Canadian Mounted* (which unfortunately isn’t a real book). And then there’s the fact that Del is played by a little Canadian actor named John Candy.



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2017 marks both *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*' 30th anniversary and the 23rd anniversary of John Candy's death. And while *Planes* is far from being Candy's only feature film (he delivered memorable performances in *Splash*, *Uncle Buck*, *Home Alone*, and many more) it's arguably his most significant. When reviewing the film back in 1987, Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel noted that *Planes* was the first time they had seen Candy in a role deserving of his comedic timing and hidden dramatic talents; Del is equal parts bumbling and endearing, as lovable as he is obnoxious. And while the scenes in which Del accidentally drives the wrong way on the freeway or realizes he's been cuddling Neal in his sleep are unquestionably funny, it's the "Chatty Cathy" scene---where Del tells Neal he's happy with who he is, faults and all---that seems to have aged the most gracefully. [Emma Stone](#) even cited the scene as one of her major comedic inspirations during *The Hollywood Reporter's* Oscars roundtable this year.

Each of Candy's roles, going all the way back to SCTV's Yosh Shmenge and Johnny LaRue, are somehow simultaneously subtle and over-the-top, Del included. All of his best qualities, as well as some of the best qualities of Canadian comedy, come together in the chicken (or is it turkey?) soup for the soul that is *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* and demonstrate just how impressive Candy's acting resume truly was. And to honour this momentous year in *Planes* and comedy history, we'll take a look at that resume now.

### KNACK FOR BROAD COMEDY

The [Swedish scene](#) from *Splash*. The [hockey game fight scene](#) from *Canadian Bacon*. The mere fact that he agreed to play a half man, half dog named Barf in *Spaceballs*. All these things and more prove that Candy could pull off a big action sequence or deliver a crazy joke like no other. When it comes to broad comedy, the driving scene in *Planes* is one of Candy's crowning achievements and remains one of the most memorable parts of the movie to this day.



### KEEN ATTENTION TO DETAIL

We're not sure if it was *Planes* director John Hughes or Candy himself who decided to keep Del's boots untied throughout the entire movie. Either way, Candy's ability to identify and play up tiny character details is yet another part of what made him such a skilled comedian. Who else could make Tommy Shanks' propensity for inserting long pauses between sentences so funny?



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### WORKS WELL IN GROUPS

You can't exactly be an introverted lone wolf type if you want to make it as an improv comedian, which Candy did when he joined the cast of *SCTV* back in 1976. Improv is all about identifying and elevating the strengths of your teammates to make scenes shine, and Candy clearly kept that in mind when he made the leap from *SCTV* to Hollywood. Candy had the chance to work with comedic ensembles in a few of his other movies (*Cool Runnings*, for example) but his ability to bring out the best in his scene partners is especially evident in *Planes*. And while Steve Martin's obviously a talented actor, his Neal would likely fall flat without a goofy, painfully oblivious Del to play off of.



### WIDE DRAMATIC RANGE

From his heartwarming farewell to Tia in *Uncle Buck* and gold medal speech in *Cool Runnings* to his turn as Dean Andrews Jr. in *JFK*, Candy was better at selling heavy emotional moments than you might think. It makes sense when you think about the fact that Candy, according to fellow *SCTV* alum Martin Short, generally valued sweet character moments over rapid-fire jokes and gags. And his ability to make you laugh one minute and cry the next is never more apparent than in the aforementioned Chatty Cathy scene. If you don't tear up at the part where Del says that his wife likes him just the way he is, you basically have no soul.



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### EXTREMELY ROOTABLE

If you met someone like Del in real life, you'd probably want him to get run over by a plane, train, automobile, and every other vehicle you can think of. But despite Del's tendency to steal taxis, wash his socks in the sink, and tell pointless, never-ending stories, there's never a moment in *Planes* when you don't want him to succeed. Because despite his faults, Del is clearly a kind, hardworking man. A lesser actor would have made Del's visit to Neal's home at the end of the movie feel like an intrusion of privacy. Candy, however, manages to convince us that Del has become an honorary member of Neal's family.



*Planes, Trains and Automobiles* 30th Anniversary Blu-ray combo pack is now available in Canada!

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