

TRIBECA

RACING DREAMS

(DOCU)

A Good/White Buffalo Entertainment/Fire Tower Films presentation of a Good/White Buffalo production. Produced by Bristol Baughan, Marshall Curry. Executive producers, Jack Turner, Dwayne Johnson, Dany Garcia, Ben Goldhirsh.

Directed by Marshall Curry. Camera (color, HD), Alan Jacobsen, Wolfgang Held, Peter Gordon, Marshall Curry; editors, Matthew Hamachek, Marshall Curry, Mary Manhardt; music, Joel Goodman; sound, Al Nelson. **Reviewed at Tribeca Film Festival (competing)**, April 29, 2009. Running time: 97 MIN.

With: Annabeth Barnes, Josh Hobson, Brandon Warren.

By **RONNIE SCHEIB**

Half lean, mean racing saga and half in-depth character study, "Racing Dreams" is a dynamite docu about three kids vying for the National Championship of the World Karting Assn. — the unofficial "Little League" of NASCAR racing. Directed by Marshall Curry (whose "Street Fight," about a corrupt Newark mayoral race, nabbed an Academy Award nomination), the perceptively balanced "Dreams" transitions seamlessly from do-

mestic drama to 70-mph heats. Winner of Tribeca's docu award, the pic promises a potentially wide audience base among fans of racing, fans of kids and fans of documentaries.

Curry has chosen three tweens who differ wildly in class, attitude and personality to represent the drivers of these extreme WKA karts, with winners often graduating to full-size racing cars well before they can legally steer the family sedan. Josh, at 12, already a four-time champ, is quiet and well behaved, performing well in school and brilliantly on the track. A pint-sized politician, he studies NASCAR pros as much for their interview style as for their driving smarts, well aware that his future in the sport depends on attracting sponsors.

Eleven-year-old Annabeth is new to the Nationals but not to the sport, having made karting headlines as a champion in a sport dominated by boys. The daughter of a retired racer dad and a self-confessed "NASCAR-addicted" mom, she grew up around the track, and is resolved to become the first woman to win the Daytona 500.

Meanwhile 13-year-old Brandon arrives at the Nationals after having his victory the year before disqualified for rough driving. Brandon has issues with anger management — the legacy of a troubled childhood.

Tracking this trio around the country to the five meets that determine the final standings, director Curry utilizes various graphic and post-production video effects to make the proceedings instantly understandable, including animated scoreboards and rendering his protagonists' vehicles in bright colors against their black-and-white competition.

But in Curry's edit, ultimate success or failure is tied to the resolution of dramatic changes the kids are undergoing at home. Annabeth bows to the pressures and joys of being a teenage girl, no longer content to forego parties and friends for long weekends of practice laps — much to the consternation of her NASCAR-centric folks. Finally, she is drawn back to competing as much by her budding romance with Brandon as by love of the sport. Only Josh appears impervious to the onrush of puberty — though not to the huge debts accrued by his middle-class parents in their support of his costly vocation.

Tech credits are superlative, with the docu almost too polished for the sense of immediacy it largely conveys.

