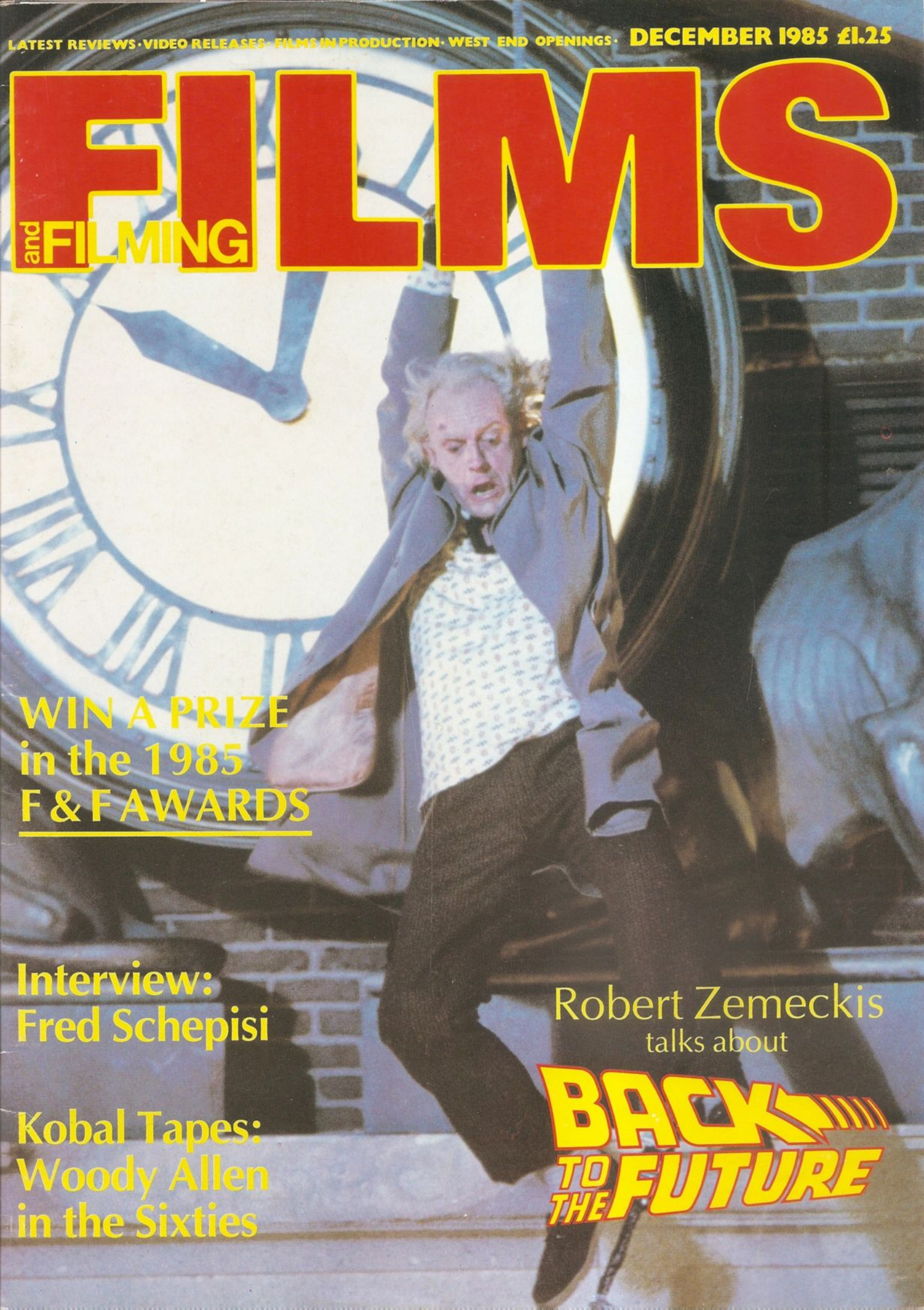


FILMS

and FILMING



**WIN A PRIZE
in the 1985
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**Interview:
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Woody Allen
in the Sixties**

Robert Zemeckis
talks about

**BACK
TO THE FUTURE**

Back to the Future with Robert Zemeckis

*Robert Zemeckis talks about this year's big blockbuster,
Back to the Future*



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Fifties High School wimp George McFly (Crispin Glover) spies on his wife-to-be in Robert Zemeckis' Back to the Future.

PACING across the set, framing the next shot between his hands, joking with a crew member or motioning to an actor about his ideas for the next scene, Robert Zemeckis appears to be in constant motion. "I love working with Bob because he's possessed", said Michael J. Fox who portrays the film's lead character, Marty McFly. "He must wake up in the morning chanting 'The movie. The movie'. And when he gets to work, he's full of energy and very positive".

Following the tremendous box office success of the adventure *Romancing the Stone* starring Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner, Zemeckis has become one of the most sought after directors working today. A 1973 graduate of the University of Southern California's film school, Zemeckis and his writing partner (who also acts as co-producer on *Back to the Future*) made an important contact while the two were studying at US — one Steven Spielberg. Describing his first

meeting with Spielberg, Zemeckis recalls, "They used to have a course at USC where those of us in the class would go to Universal once a week and spend the day in a different department to learn how the studio worked. The last day of the semester they said we were going to meet with a young director, Steven Spielberg.

"I want to wake people up and force them to suspend disbelief"

He had just finished his first feature, *The Sugarland Express* for what seemed like a huge budget: \$2 million. We walked into his office, and the door opened and this kid walked in. After the class I hung back and said to him, 'I have this student film. Would you like to see it?'

"*Back to the Future* is a comedy-adventure-science-speculation-coming-of-age-rock-and-roll-time-travel-

period film", laughs Zemeckis, "about combination of every film genre". He adds, "My feeling about making a time travel movie into a fun adventure is to take the audience back in time, because everyone who sees the movie knows recent history". Zemeckis and Gale chose 1955 as their destination on the time line, a year which they are too young to really remember but which they look back at fondly. "I guess the thing that happened in the Fifties that makes it so nostalgic throughout the decades that followed was that it was the first time that the teenager started to rule — and he's ruled ever since".

Teenagers were the focus of Zemeckis' feature film debut in 1978, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, a comically nostalgic story of the Beatles' first trip to New York for an appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. His next film was from a screenplay co-written by Bob Gale, based on an idea by Spielberg and John Miluis, titled *Used Cars*. Kurt Russell starred in



Zemeckis' debut film *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* followed the fortunes of a group of teenagers eagerly awaiting the Beatles' arrival in New York in 1964.



Kurt Russell, Cheryl Rixon and David L. Lander in the irreverent comedy about the motor trade - *Used Cars*.

the irreverent comedy that was applauded by both critics and audiences alike. Zemeckis and Gale then shared the writing credit with John Milius on *1941*, Steven Spielberg's ill-fated World War II comedy.

"That was a good experience", Zemeckis recalls. "Even though it wasn't such a commercial success as some of my other films - I learnt a lot".

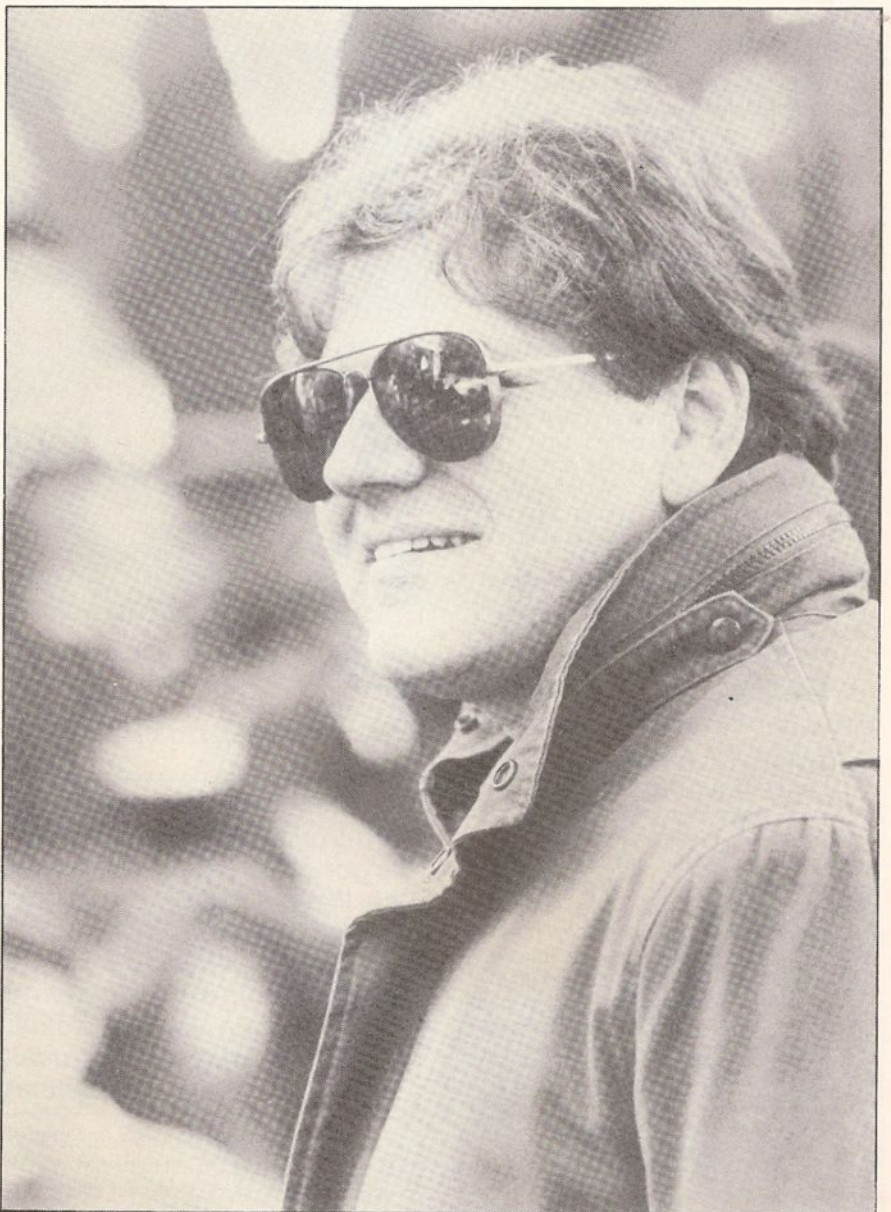
The learning process is what drew Zemeckis to the industry initially. "I have to feel that each project is a new experience - that I will learn something new about the human condition. I feel that films reflect the mood swings of the public at that time. I remember when *Bonnie and Clyde* came out, I went to see it, and it seemed to be more about the upheaval and restless

"When I first saw Bob Zemeckis's student film (*Field of Honor*) at USC, from which I hired him to direct *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, he had done a highly stylized film, I feel that every film Zemeckis and Gale have made, and every film Zemeckis has directed, has been a high order of pop cultural art - something that I don't think any other filmmakers are tapping into".
Steven Spielberg

Sixties than the era in which it was set".

Zemeckis grew determined to use film to make strong statements. "I want to wake people up and transport them to another form of existence - force them to suspend their disbelief if you like".

Zemeckis admits to worrying constantly about the financial obligations he has as a film maker. "We must show a return and a damn good one on one in three projects - or (so I've heard) your name goes down to the 'B' list. It's something that's impossible to forget. It's mainly caused by the high cost of film production. These days you can't turn out



Robert Zemeckis.

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Kathleen Turner in *Romancing the Stone*, Robert Zemeckis' smash hit romantic-adventure.

anything decent under \$20 million. That's a staggering sum for two hours of entertainment. I feel sorry for today's young hopefuls. In any case I'm very excited about this new film – it's the *only* film so far to turn out like the original concept".

Born and raised in the southside of Chicago, Zemeckis began making short films with his 8mm camera while still in high school. He attended Northern Illinois University before transferring to the University of Southern California. "The business has always been in my blood", he admits. "I even married an actress (Mary Ellen Trainor) so we could talk shop at home. She's my sounding-board. I'm something of a workaholic and so it's great for me to be surrounded by industry minded people. I'm also a very sensitive person. I react strongly to criticism and need to be in the midst of a support group. All this however doesn't apply to directing. When I'm working this supreme confidence comes out of nowhere. It lifts me up and carries me like a great wave. It

"With *Romancing the Stone* I felt we hit a perfect balance – a good family entertainment and a love story. I was 90 per cent sure it would do well".

can last days or months depending on the filming schedule. After that it's post-production, followed by publicity – that's the scary part. The power of the press wow. Critics just don't know how much influence they really have. In L.A. the reviews help the studio decide how many prints of a film they're going to invest in! That's a lot of power. I really sweat at preview night. With *Romancing the Stone* I felt we hit a perfect balance – good family entertainment and a love story. I was 90 per cent sure it would do well. I would have loved to have been asked to work on the sequel *Jewel on the Nile*, but it was really a matter of complicated scheduling. My next project is still under wraps, but it's completely different. I like to surprise people with the diversity of my films".



Michael J. Fox as the teenage hero of Zemeckis' latest blockbuster, *Back to the Future*.

"Back to the Future is such an entertaining movie because it's got a little bit of everything. It's like somebody brought a big dumpster full of good ideas and backed it up and poured them all through my window, with Bob Zemeckis behind the wheel of the truck".
Steven Spielberg

I asked Zemeckis how he sets about casting his movies. "Casting is always a crucial element. I always select all the right type of people and then I get as many as possible of them to read for it. That's sometimes tough for the big stars. But I've

always been good at handling ego problems. Most major stars are like children and if you treat them fairly they just blossom. We had no major egos on this set – I think that's unusual for a Hollywood film. Mostly we were like a big happy family. I always find the atmosphere on comedies a lot lighter and easy to handle. As for the crew, well I tend to stick with some old favourites. When you're out in god knows where – you want to see some familiar faces. I try to make life easy for everyone while filming. Everyone has a job to do that's very specific and I don't ask for more. Initially I select people who give 200 per cent to the film – real professionals".

Zemeckis feels the main element in predicting the appeal of any film is the script. "You would be amazed at the amount of scripts I get sent each week. For the most part garbage, but so many are just badly written. It's true to say I've often been walking around with backers hunting

"I only want to be a commercial success so that I can keep doing what I enjoy most in the world"

high and low for a good story to tell. *Romancing the Stone* was a God-send. I fell in love with the story and thoroughly enjoyed the casting process. Michael Douglas was an easy choice, but for the female lead I read every leading lady in the U.S.! Kathleen Turner gave a sexy performance, with a hint of innocence. I found myself hearing the words afresh. She was delightful."

I asked Zemeckis if he still went to the movies. "It's strange but even on days off I go to the movies to relax. I loved the *Mad Max* movies. I think Mel Gibson is amazing and hope to work with him someday soon. I admire Diane Keaton and Meryl Streep. I saw *The Deer Hunter* 16 times! I was trying to figure out the hidden messages in each scene – it's an incredible movie. I could still watch it again and again – it's very profound".

In America alone *Back to the Future* has grossed over \$40 million and Zemeckis is delighted to be a bankable director. "I only want to be a commercial success so that I can keep doing what I enjoy the most in the world and what I feel is my best skill. It's largely due to Spielberg – who gave me my first break, that I'm here today. In return I want to give others a good start. After all the headaches and worries of big budgets and the logistical problems of filming it's still a magical business and I'm proud to be a part".

INTERVIEW BY ANNA CRYSTAL

Filmography

- I Wanna Hold Your Hand (1978)
- Used Cars (1979)
- Romancing The Stone (1984)
- Back to The Future (1985)

Reviews

Ratings of Film Reviews

****outstanding ***very good **good or interesting *poor ■dud



Colonel Redd



St Elmo's Fire



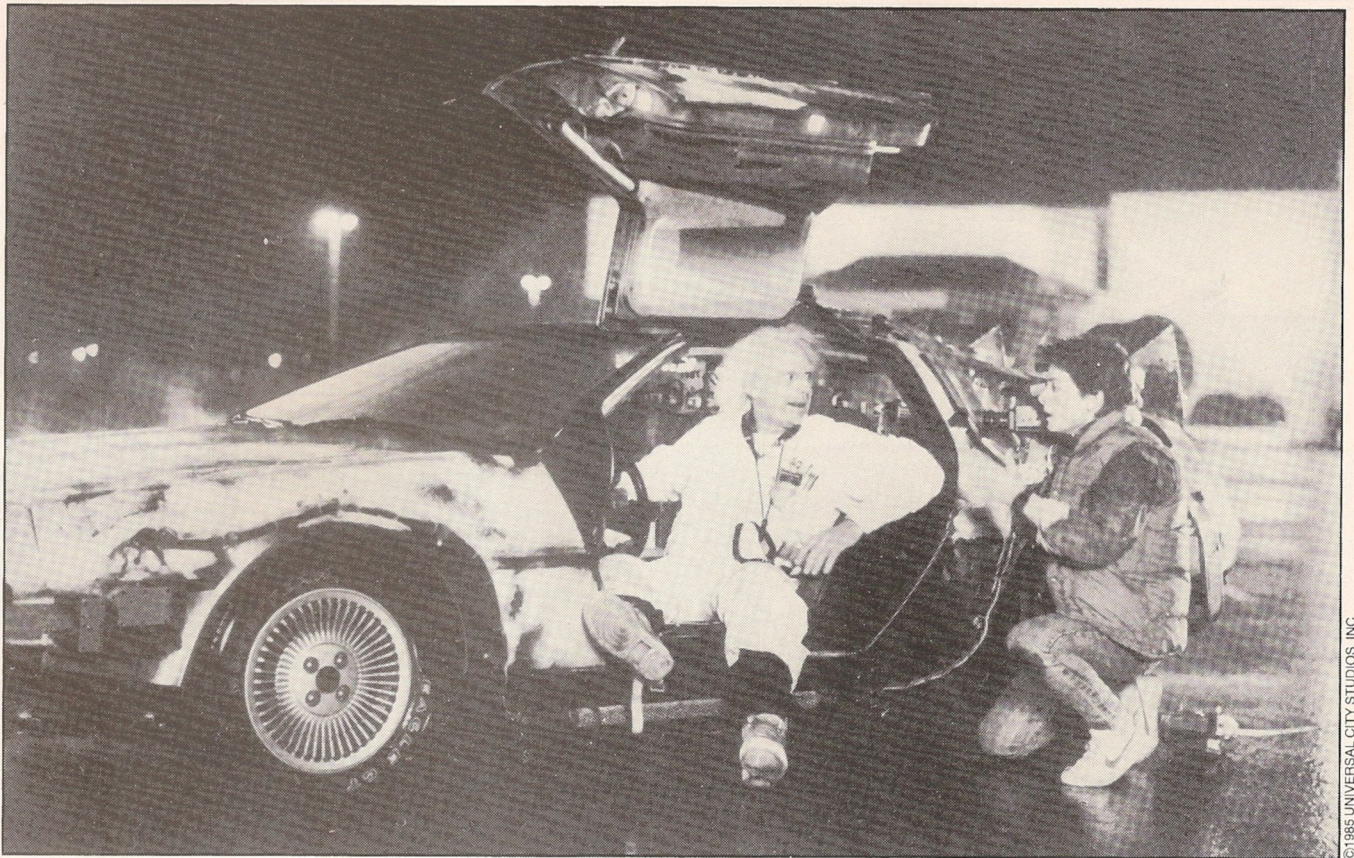
Legend



Silverado



Back to the Future



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"If you're going to travel back in time", explains Doc (Christopher Lloyd) to Marty (Michael J Fox), "you might as well do it in style". Hence the DeLorean sports car cum time machine.

Back to the Future

* * *

Certificate: PG

Starring: **Michael J. Fox**, **Christopher Lloyd**.
Cast: **Michael J. Fox** (Marty McFly), **Christopher Lloyd** ('Doc' Brown), **Lea Thompson** (Lorraine Baines/McFly), **Crispin Glover** (George McFly), **Thomas F. Wilson** (Biff), **Claudia Wells** (Jennifer Parker), **Marc McClure** (Dave McFly), **Wendie Jo Sperber** (Linda McFly), **George DiCenzo** (Sam Baines).

116 mins. Panavision. Technicolor. Director: **Robert Zemeckis**. Producer: **Bob Gale** and **Neil Canton**. Screenplay: **Robert Zemeckis**, **Bob Gale**. Photographer: **Dean Cundey**. Production designer: **Lawrence G. Paull**. Costumes: **Deborah L. Scott**. Decor: **Hal Gausman**. Special effects: **Steven Suits**, **Kimberley Pike**, **Sam Adams**, **Richard Chronister**, **William Klinger**, **Neil Smith**, **David Wischnack**. Editors: **Arthur Schmidt**, **Harry Keramidas**. Executive producers: **Steven Spielberg**, **Kathleen Kennedy**, **Frank Marshall**. Music: **Alan Siivestri**. Sound: **Charles L. Campbell**, **Robert Rutledge**. Production company: **Universal**. Distributor: **UIP**.

"Doc, are you trying to tell me you built a time machine out of a DeLorean???"

The date is 25 October 1985, the answer is "Yes"; inventor Dr. Emmet Brown has built a time machine out of a DeLorean and young Marty McFly is going to climb into it and drive himself 30 years back into the past - where the first people he meets in Hill Valley 1955 will be

his own parents when they were 18. Fair enough - until Marty's future mum falls in love with Marty instead of with Marty's future dad, which besides being a little incestuous also threatens to nullify everything that's supposed to happen to the McFly family over the next 30 years, including Marty himself...

THERE are a couple of moments when it uses pace to cover narrative discrepancies a bit too freely, and time travel aficionados may well spot the odd technical inconsistency, but aside from those small quibbles *Back to the Future* is as exciting, as entertaining, and in some respects at least as thoughtful a film of its kind as you could ever ask for.

Steven Spielberg served as executive producer-cum-Godfather on the project and his liberal-hopeful vision of the world is strongly in evidence throughout: Good can triumph if good men and women will only try hard enough; the young *do* have the power to correct their elders' mistakes if the elders will only let them. But if you don't happen to subscribe to those particular messages, don't worry; you'll still have a terrific time racing along after the action and trying to figure out how the hell Doc Brown (*Taxi* star Christopher Lloyd in a fright wig), 30 years younger but as looney as ever, is going to get Marty back to the future before he doesn't have any future left to go back to.

In and around the near non-stop frenzy, director Robert Zemeckis and writer Bob Gale have managed to insert some very funny and telling comments

about mid-American socio/political history since the days when Ronald Reagan was still pretending to be an actor instead of a President. What they've been particularly astute about is pinpointing changes of attitude about music, dress, diet, courtship, status symbols and the like - little things which they then succeed in blending into the narrative so that the sense of difference between Marty's generation and his parents' finally becomes the central issue without interfering in any way with the outlandish action that's unfolding. Marty, with his 30-year headstart on the past, has the ability to dazzle and dismay, rather like the Connecticut Yankee, by simply doing things that are for him perfectly normal. He skateboards, he orders sugar-free drinks at the soda fountain (a kid who doesn't like *sugar?*), he wears a body-warmer that makes people think he's a sailor who's forgotten to take off his life jacket, he calls brand new TV shows "returns", and he does some very disturbing stuff indeed with an electric guitar at the Hill Valley High School prom. All details, the minutiae of the cultural lexicon, but finely observed and very nicely brought to bear on the story's outcome.

Spot-on photography and special effects, first-rate score, solid acting straight through the cast list, and a make-up team headed by Ken Chase who do a brilliant job shifting Marty's mom and dad across the generations from 48 to 18 and back again. Splendid film. I always suspected that DeLorean guy was good for something.

GEORGE ROBERT KIMBALL



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Marty and Doc witness the first successful testing of the time machine.



Eighties teenager Marty McFly rocks a 1955 high school bop with a Chuck Berry song ... which has yet to be written.



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Time travelling Marty comes face to face with the teenager (Lea Thompson) who will become his mother in Back to the Future.