



Dirty Harry Ultimate Collector's Edition (1971-1988)

2.35:1/1.85:1 (enhanced for widescreen televisions)

Dolby Digital 5.1

Warner Home Video, \$74.98

In 1971, during a time of massive transition in Hollywood and of social upheaval in America at large, director Don Siegel and actor Clint Eastwood created one of the most memorable figures in all of action cinema, “Dirty” Harry Callahan. A cop whose disdain for bureaucracy led to unconventional methods — such as torturing a suspect in order to extract information — Callahan could be viewed as a maverick hero or a fascist psychopath, depending on one’s political persuasion. Siegel’s ambivalent presentation and Eastwood’s stoic mannerisms left plenty of ambiguous shadings for the viewer to consider. While critics of the time (most notoriously Pauline Kael, who hated the film) debated the value of Siegel’s violent vision, audiences recognized a new kind of action hero and made the movie a smash hit. The character would eventually go on to appear in four popular sequels, all of which have been remastered and packaged with an abundance of extras in the seven-disc Dirty Harry Ultimate Collector’s Edition box set.

The original Dirty Harry has aged well, and with the controversy surrounding its politics squarely placed into the past, one can see it for what it is: a richly layered, aesthetically groundbreaking action masterpiece. The movie occupies an unusual historical space between the escapist studio entertainment that preceded it (like the Warner Bros. movies on which Siegel cut his teeth as a montage director) and the more morally complex films that would win acclaim in the era of Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman and Bob Rafelson.

Violent, antisocial and perpetually angry (screenwriter John Milius described the character as “God’s lonely man”), Harry Callahan was a transitional figure between John Wayne and Taxi Driver’s Travis Bickle, as well as an expression of a sort of middle-class rage that was building in the age of Vietnam, Nixon and Woodstock. Viewed today, Dirty Harry is an exceptionally satisfying film, a riveting and visceral shoot-’em-up that’s also a somber character study and the prototype for dozens of action movies that would follow. It’s impossible to imagine 48 Hrs., Lethal Weapon or the television series 24 as they were made if Dirty Harry never existed.

The film’s influence extends far beyond its content, thanks to cinematography by Bruce Surtees, ASC, one of Eastwood’s most trusted collaborators and one of the great stylists of contemporary American cinema. Dirty Harry was the third collaboration between Surtees and Eastwood to be released in 1971 (following Siegel’s *The Beguiled* and Eastwood’s directorial debut, *Play Misty for Me*), and it was the film on which Surtees established the aesthetic that would come to define many of his later partnerships with Eastwood. It’s a sensibility characterized by extreme darkness, with chiaroscuro exteriors in which threats could be hiding in any black corner of the frame. Throughout the Dirty Harry series (particularly in *Sudden Impact*, which was also photographed by Surtees), Callahan moves through a world of literal and figurative shadows, an urban landscape made hostile and ominous by Surtees’ then highly innovative (now widely imitated) location lighting.

The darker nuances of the images have tended to be murky on previous video editions of Dirty Harry, but the newly remastered DVD corrects those flaws to provide a sharp, textured presentation of Surtees’ work. The colors of early 1970s San Francisco are bright and vibrant in the daylight scenes, and the subtle gradations of black that typify the night exteriors and interiors are impeccably preserved. The disc also includes a clear, powerful 5.1 sound mix on which composer Lalo Schifrin’s iconic jazz score sounds better than ever.

The two-disc special edition of Dirty Harry comes with a generous array of supplements, starting with an informative commentary track by Eastwood biographer Richard Schickel. In addition, there’s a half-hour interview gallery with Eastwood and several of his collaborators, the hourlong TV profile “Clint Eastwood: The Man From Malpaso,” and a halfhour documentary from the 2001 DVD release of Dirty Harry that explores the character’s genesis and evolution. The best of the extras is a 25-minute documentary directed by Gary Leva, titled “The Long Shadow of Dirty Harry.” This brand new featurette includes interviews with Eastwood, cinematographer Jack N. Green, ASC, and other collaborators and famous fans (such as filmmakers John Badham and Shane Black), all of whom provide thoughtful comments on the movie’s political and aesthetic impact.

Leva contributes additional documentaries to all of the other films in the set and, when taken cumulatively, the featurettes explore the Dirty Harry phenomenon from every possible perspective, including production, reception and influence. The sequels also all come with commentary tracks, including Schickel again on Sudden Impact and Green on The Dead Pool. The transfers are uniformly excellent, and Magnum Force and The Enforcer include vintage featurettes in addition to the commentaries and new supplements.

All of these discs are available separately at \$14.97 each (\$20.97 for the original Dirty Harry), but Eastwood enthusiasts will want to pick up the box set for its seventh bonus disc, which contains Clint Eastwood: Out of the Shadows. This 90-minute documentary from the American Masters series was written by Dave Kehr, one of the first American critics to write thoughtfully about Eastwood as a director, and it's a terrific overview of his development as an artist.

The box set also includes a variety of inserts, some silly (a Harry Callahan police badge) and some interesting (a collection of promotional materials and a map of locations from the first film). As one of Harry Callahan's signature lines asks — “do you feel lucky?” — any serious fan of Eastwood or of action movies in general will feel very lucky to add the supplement-heavy Dirty Harry Ultimate Collector's Edition to his collection.