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Dirty Harry: Ultimate Collector's Edition / Blu-ray

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In-House Review:

Grab The Soap! I'm Feeling Extra Dirty!
4.00 out of 5.00 - Film: 4 Features: 4 Video: 4 Audio: 4 - 6/3/2008

When people think of Clint Eastwood, many probably think about his great directorial efforts of the past decade, or perhaps his lengthy resume of Westerns. But Clint will always be Dirty Harry to me. With a gleam in his eye that would make even the bravest among us shiver, and a take-no-prisoners attitude toward his police work, is it any wonder why Detective Harry Callahan became a cultural phenomenon?

The Dirty Harry quintet of films has finally made its way to Blu-ray in this special Collector's Edition set (also available on standard DVD). How does it compare to similar special edition sets we've seen on the format? Let's take a look:

THE MOVIES

It's perhaps no surprise that the first film in the series, Dirty Harry is still the best. It's based loosely on the Zodiac killings of the late 1960s, with Harry trying to track down a killer known as "Scorpio" (played by Andy Robinson). Made during a period in the United States where laws



seem to worry about the rights of the criminal more than the victim, the movie plays more like a straightforward action flick today, but was pretty controversial at the time of release.

Harry returns in *Magnum Force*, a movie that addresses some of the vigilante concerns brought up in the first flick. Many viewers of the first film felt that Harry Callahan was operating outside of the law, so here's a movie that sees what he'll do when he discovers a group of rogue cops within his own police force. It's not as strong as a film as the original, but it's a close second.

*The Enforcer* is seen by most fans as the weak point of the series, but I think it's a rather good film. It's more of a straightforward cop movie than the previous two, but for pure entertainment value it holds up quite well. This one, of course, is famous for giving Harry his first (and only) female partner, played by Tyne Daly.

With its "Go ahead, make my day" dialogue and the fact that it hit screens during the heart of the Reagan era (1983), *Sudden Impact* is the most financially successful of any of the *Dirty Harry* movies. With that said, it's actually my least favorite of the lot. The Harry Callahan character is much too dark and angry in this film (the only of the five which was directed by Clint himself) and the sense of fun that permeated much of the first three titles is all but missing here.

Dirty Harry returned one last time in 1988's *The Dead Pool*, a movie that critics blasted at the time, but one that is actually a whole lot of fun. Harry's target this time around is the media's obsession over celebrity (hey, maybe that's why critics hated it), and features one of the best (and creative) car chases since Steve McQueen's *Bullitt*.

## THE BONUS MATERIALS

### Feature-Length Commentaries

Each one of the movies contains a commentary track, although sadly none of the five are from Clint Eastwood himself.

Both *Dirty Harry* and *Sudden Impact* feature commentaries from Richard Schickel, film historian, Time magazine movie critic, and Eastwood's official biographer. I'm a big fan of Schickel's writing and criticism, so I was looking forward to a pair of very interesting commentaries. Sadly, Schickel makes the cardinal sin of any DVD commentary track: he spends too much time describing what is transpiring on-screen. Eventually, he settles in and starts telling us more personal info about Eastwood and more "behind the scenes" stuff about the movies, but of all the commentaries on this set, the two by Schickel are the least entertaining.

By contrast, the *Magnum Force* commentary by John Milius is just a whole lot of fun. Perhaps that's because Milius makes his living as a storyteller (he came up with the story for *Magnum Force* and co-wrote the script with Michael Cimino). Milius fills up his commentary with inside information, stories from the set, and just humorous observations on the action that listeners should love. This is the best commentary of the five.

The only commentary actually to come from a director is one from James Fargo for *The Enforcer*. This is an okay track...not as dull as parts of Schickel's, but not as entertaining as Milius'. It's worth a listen, although it's one you'll probably go through and quickly forget.

Finally, the commentary track for *The Dead Pool* is notable because it's the only track to feature two people: Producer David Valdes and Cinematographer Jack N. Green. What might have been a dull track turns into an interesting one since the two men bounce a lot of questions off each other during the course of the movie. As a result, this was my second favorite commentary of the five.

### Featurettes

Each of the five discs contain at least one featurette, with the *Dirty Harry* disc containing the most segments of any of the five titles. However, most of the material isn't new (although a lot of it hasn't been available on home video before), with Warners only including one brand-new

featurette on each disc (for a total of five new segments). Also of note is the fact that *none* of the bonus material (including trailers) is presented in high definition.

The *Dirty Harry* disc starts off with two featurettes that were included on the old 30th Anniversary standard DVD release: “*Dirty Harry: The Original*” and “*Dirty Harry’s Way*”. The first is a 2001 documentary on the movie hosted by the late Robert Urich, and the second is a behind the scenes promo piece that was created back in 1971 for the film’s release. “*The Long Shadow of Dirty Harry*” is a brand-new piece, featuring comments from Eastwood himself. Most of the same interviewees in this piece (including Eastwood) appear on each disc’s brand-new featurette. Although neither are new, Eastwood fans should love the inclusion of two documentaries – the 1993 TV doc “*Clint Eastwood: The Man From Malpaso*” and the 2000 American Masters’ feature-length “*Clint Eastwood: Out Of The Shadows*”. Both are highly entertaining views, with the former clocking in at an hour and the latter at 90 minutes.

Rounding out the *Dirty Harry* disc is an interview gallery with comments from a number of notable celebrities on Eastwood, including Hal Holbrook, John Milius, Andrew Robinson, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and even Eastwood himself. Also on this disc (as well as repeated on all the discs) are the theatrical trailers for all five *Dirty Harry* movies.

*Magnum Force* includes the new featurette “*A Moral Right: The Politics of Dirty Harry*” as well as 1973’s “*The Hero Cop: Yesterday and Today*”. *The Enforcer* features the new “*The Business End: Violence in Cinema*” along with 1976’s “*Harry Callahan/Clint Eastwood: Something Special In Films.*” The new featurette on *Sudden Impact* is entitled “*The Evolution of Clint Eastwood*” (yet another nice documentary on his career); while the one on *The Dead Pool* is called “*The Craft Of Dirty Harry*”.

What’s missing in all these extras? Well, considering the wealth of materials that probably exist for these five films, I’m guessing a lot. No deleted scenes, no photo galleries, and while each movie is discussed to one degree or another in these featurettes, there’s really no in-depth examination of the making of any of these movies when compared to the kind of all-inclusive materials we’ve seen on other collector’s sets, even ones released by Warners (such as *Blade Runner* or even *The Batman Anthology* from a few years back).

## VIDEO & AUDIO

Going into these, I would have guessed that the original *Dirty Harry* would have gotten the best treatment in terms of a clean-up and transfer, with the other four films getting a more standard transfer. However, the quality of the video definitely improves as the films get more recent – with *Sudden Impact* and *The Dead Pool* (the only movie of the five not in 2.40:1...it’s 1.85:1) looking the best.

The original *Dirty Harry* definitely looks better than I’ve ever seen it on home video, but it’s far from a clean print – as much of the dirt and defects are still quite visible. It actually looks like some shots Warners completely cleaned up, while others they just kind of left be. The result is going to please most viewers, but not have them jumping up and down with joy.

Both *Magnum Force* and *The Enforcer* actually look a bit better than *Dirty Harry*, although there are still problems with excessive grain and/or dirt in shots. *Sudden Impact* is a quantum leap in quality over the three pictures that proceed it. Both it and *The Dead Pool* look fantastic on the Blu-ray format.

As for the audio, all films are presented in Dolby TrueHD 5.1, with Dolby Digital 5.1 also an option. The audio is solid without being overbearing. It’s not spectacular, but most viewers shouldn’t have any complaints. All movies contain some combination of either 2.0 or 1.0 French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese and Portuguese. Subtitles in all of the already mentioned languages, as well as Dutch, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish are also available.

## OTHER GOODIES

In addition to the Blu-ray discs themselves, Warners has included a number of other “goodies” in this boxed set.

There's a 42-page booklet (that's about the size of a DVD case in width and height) that covers all five movies. There's not a lot of text here...this is basically a photo book with a few interesting facts about each of the movies and the characters in them.

Buyers of this set will also be treated to a replica ID badge (sadly, not made of metal), which includes a removable Harry Callahan police ID. There's also a (19"x27" and folded) poster that details Harry's tracking of the Scorpio killer in the first film, along with 6 art cards (5"x7") – one for each film and one with a montage of Eastwood photos from the movies. There's also a series of 5"x7" reproductions of various correspondence that went back and forth during the filming of these movies between those involved. These are actually quite interesting and include a memo regarding Frank Sinatra's withdrawal from the first film (he was originally supposed to play Harry Callahan), as well as a letter from Clint Eastwood to Warner Chairman Steven J. Ross thanking him for all his help with the release of *Sudden Impact*.

Finally, each box set comes with a personal message from Clint Eastwood, thanking the buyer for picking up the set and encouraging them to check out all the bonus materials.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

This is an extremely well-made, if not completely top-notch Collector's Edition from Warners that every Clint Eastwood fan will want to add to their collection. It's not all-inclusive enough to give it top marks, nor does the A/V transfer of the movies fall into the "reference quality" range, but it's certainly a must-own release, regardless.

Would you expect anything less from the man from Malpas?

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