



HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

A film by Alex Cox

1991 / USA / Mexico / Japan / 104 min. / In Spanish with English Subtitles

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Synopsis:

Repo Man director Alex Cox went south of the border to film this dramatic tale of a rookie member of Mexico's national highway patrol, who struggles to keep on the straight and narrow in a department rife with corruption. Now available in a new 4K restoration overseen by the director.

Director's Statement:

In 1986, Lorenzo O'Brien and I were scouting locations for *Walker* in the Mexican Sierra Madre. We shot that film almost entirely in Nicaragua, but for the duration of our Mexican scout, our driver was a former Highway Patrolman, Poncho Granados.

Poncho entertained us greatly with stories of his experiences in the Mexican Highway Patrol, and the idea of a film took root. After the release of *Walker*, Lorenzo and I found that neither of us could get arrested in Hollywood. So we went back to Mexico, tracked down Poncho, and interviewed him for several days. Those interviews formed the basis for Lorenzo's script, *Highway Patrolman*.

Pretty much everything that happens in *Highway Patrolman* happened to Poncho. If it didn't happen to him, it happened to Lorenzo, or to me. We soon realized that Lorenzo's script - with a multiplicity of characters and locations all over Northern Mexico, would be expensive to make. But we found a financial angel in Kuniaki Negishi, a Japanese producer and distributor who didn't mind that the film would be in Spanish since for his purposes it would be subtitled in Japanese. Years later, we asked Negi-san why he had been so enthusiastic about the project. He told us, "I thought it was a samurai film."

Highway Patrolman is probably my best picture, and perhaps Lorenzo's best script. It was shot in a series of long, hand-held takes - what the Mexicans call 'plano secuencía', by a wonderfully strong and gifted cinematographer, Miguel Garzon. The Highway Patrol weren't exactly keen on us telling the authentic story of one of their operatives, so our production designer, Cecilia Montiel, invented a fictitious police force, complete with cars, logos, badges and uniforms.

How Lorenzo managed the negotiations with the real Highway Patrol, and saved the production from being shut down, is a story in itself — I tell it in my book, *X Films*.

The casting director, Claudia Becker, gave us the best cast I had ever had. Zander Schloss, who played Karl, the Weiner Kid, in *Straight to Hell*, provided us with the score. And Tito Larriva, who had co-written the score for *Repo Man*, gave us our title song.

I used to think *Highway Patrolman* was about the impossibility of doing good. But now I think it's really about the impossibility of imposing goodness on others. Today it can be seen as a film about the drug war, of course — a Mexican film genre in itself, which has produced some masterpieces, like *Ms. Bala* and *El Infierno*.

Pobre Mexico! As they say, so far from God, so close to the United States... I was back there earlier this year, playing the CIA station chief in a series about the events of 1968. This year, just as in 1991, when we shot *Highway Patrolman*, I was formidably impressed by the cast and crew - how professional, fast, talented, and courteous they all were: how dedicated, not to making money, but to making a great drama on a tight budget. Mexico is still the best place in the world to make a film.

A couple of years back I received an email from Francisco Milla Baeza, an instructor in the Spanish Agrupación de Tráfico - their own Highway Patrol. He wanted permission to extract clips from the film to use in the classroom, to show his recruits what they were in for - the kind of situations they might encounter on the road. I can't think of a better recommendation for the film.

Alex Cox, 2018

Crew:

Director
Writers
Director of Photography
Producer
Editing
Production Design
Art Direction

Costume Design
Casting

Alex Cox
Lorenzo O'Brien
Miguel Garzon
Lorenzo O'Brien
Carlos Puente
Cecilia Montiel
Homero Espinoza
Bryce Perrin
Manuela Loeza
Claudia Becker
Miguel Sandoval

Cast:

Pedro
Anibal
Maribel
Griselda
Sargento Barreras
Abuela
Emilio
Comandante Navarro
Comandante Sanchez

Roberto Sosa
Bruno Bichir
Vanessa Bauche
Zaide Silvia Gutierrez
Pedro Armendariz Jr.
Malena Doria
Towi Islas
Ernesto Gomez Cruz
Mike Moroff