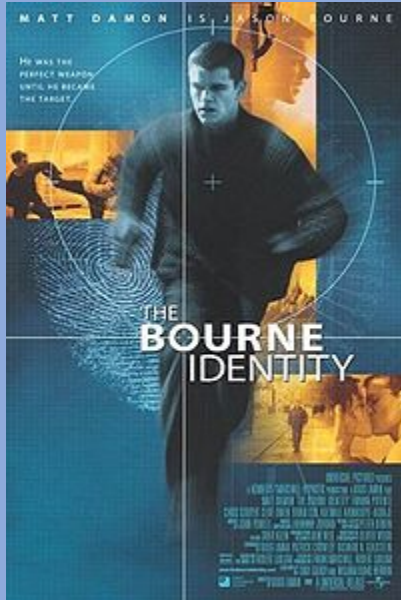


Review of *The Bourne Identity*



*Slick without stumbling, tense without tedium, and action without gratuity, Doug Liman's **Bourne** recharges the action genre.*

By Steven Horn

If you are anything like me, the mere idea of an espionage-infused spy thriller ranks pretty low on your list of must-sees. It's not because the genre is deficient or unexciting, but because all of the decent stories have already been told, all the cool gadgets have been seen, and all the explosions and car chases have been done to death. I mean seriously, how many times are we going to see the American/British superspy open a back channel to the Russian/German superspy thereby saving the world from something horrible and insidious? Even lampoons of the espionage genre are tired.

Thankfully, in *The Bourne Identity*, the stakes are much lower than saving the world and the result is a cozy ride. When our hero is pulled aboard a fishing boat with a couple bullets in his back, no memory, and a number tattooed on his side, thus begins a search for the man we will come to know as Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) trying to figure out who he is, all the while leaving a trail of bodies and dodging assassins.

Once he pops open a safety deposit box and finds it packed full of cash, passports, and other documents, Bourne begins trekking to the Paris to see what he can turn up at the address he uncovers. In order to travel without leaving a paper trail, he offers Marie (Franke Potente) \$10,000 to drive him there. The two form an immediate bond as Bourne dodges his pursuers and tries to get to the bottom of who he is.

There are plenty of things to like about *The Bourne Identity*. For starters, Damon gives Bourne a generally likeable persona even as he continues to uncover pieces of his past that are not wholly admirable. It was very cool to watch Bourne's bewildered reactions when he finds out he was an expert in martial arts. That's also part of the appeal of the film as a whole, even though we're in on the fact that Bourne was once a not-so-nice guy, it is great fun to watch him discover it for himself.



Secondly, the relationship between Jason and Marie is very well done, never really bogging down the story or setting up the familiar "damsel in distress" metaphor. Here Marie is an active participant in the story and is several steps above typical spy arm-candy. Potente roundly proves her *Run Lola Run* prowess was no fluke as she makes Marie one of the more likeable characters to populate a spy film in a good while.

Chris Cooper, one of my favorites, also shows up as Conklin, the head of a scary secret CIA operation. Cooper solidly nails the role of a bureaucrat who has not forgotten how to shoot a weapon. Largely unused in the film however is Brian Cox and Julia Stiles, both decent actors relegated to forgettable roles.



Finally, *The Bourne Identity* DOES indeed have some traditional action elements including a car chase that will pin your ears back. Though lacking the speed and depth of chases in films like *Ronin*, it is nevertheless a treat to see a tiny Austin Mini banging down the staircases, alleys, and narrow streets of Paris. In several nail-biting moments, Bourne actually whips the car the wrong way down one-way streets. Also expertly crafted is a sequence where Bourne meets Conklin in broad daylight... with tons of spies, spooks, and tails watching the scene.

All in all, this is definitely one to check out. Liman (director of *Swingers* and *Go*) paces the film beautifully, doesn't resort to an abundance of clichés, and helps give the film some signature visual moments. In a summer of nuclear bombs blowing up Baltimore, CGI Scoobys, and a bunch of aliens descending on Earth, *The Bourne Identity* is a nice romp back into the spy thrillers of old... and in color too!

THE BOURNE IDENTITY

Director: Doug Liman

Screenplay: Tony Gilroy & William Blake Herron

Novel: *The Bourne Identity* by Robert Ludlum

Cast

Matt Damon, Clive Owen, Chris Cooper, Brian Cox, Franka Potente, Julia Stiles, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje

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