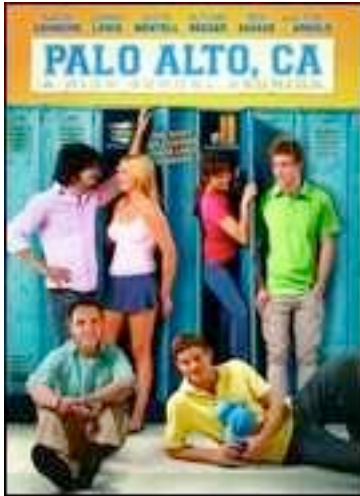




Palo Alto



[Image Entertainment](#) // 2007 // 95 Minutes // Rated R
Reviewed by Judge Paul Pritchard // January 14th, 2009

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While at school, Judge Paul Pritchard was given the cane twice a day, something he insists upon even now. He's been a bad boy.

Note: This is a pre-release review. **Palo Alto** will be available for purchase on February 17th, 2009

The Charge

One Night Will Change Their Lives Forever.

Opening Statement

Fronted by three young filmmakers from Palo Alto, California, **Palo Alto** is the feature debut of writer/director Brad Leong, writer Tony Vallone, and producer Daniel Engelhardt. Shot on location in the city of Palo Alto, the film aspires to offer a realistic examination of today's young adults.

Facts of the Case

On the last night of their Thanksgiving holiday, four college freshmen enjoy a night out in their hometown of Palo Alto. Following an after-hours visit to their old high school and a run-in with the school security, the four friends say their goodbyes and head home. Or so they think.

Alec (Aaron Ashmore, *Smallville*) meets up with an older member of his college fraternity. Though a mutual admiration and a sharing of stories initially fuel their friendship, Alec is soon drawn into a situation that leads him to question his loyalties.

Ryan (Justin Mentell, *Boston Legal*) heads out to see Audrey, a young girl he hooks up with whenever he is back home. Though Ryan is interested in Audrey only for the physical relationship they share, Audrey hopes for more, and her reaction to Ryan's frank admission on how he views her sets off a series of events that give Ryan reason to reconsider what is truly important.

Patrick (Ben Savage, *Boy Meets World*) is the most cocksure of the four friends, and has his whole future planned out ahead of him. But a visit to his long-term girlfriend sees Patrick's world come crashing down around him.

Nolan (Johnny Lewis, ***One Missed Call***), guided by the wisdom of his old school bus driver, is thrown together with a young girl, Jaime, and takes his first steps on the path of young love.

The Evidence

Writer/Director Brad Leong's debut feature, co-written with Tony Vallone, combines a great cast with a strong story containing almost universal appeal. Though the film's trailer and posters hint at an ***American Pie*** style comedy, ***Palo Alto*** is a lot more subtle in its approach, and never feels the need to tell its story in broad strokes, reveling instead in the fine detail that makes up the lives of the four young men on whom its narrative focuses. The characters feel real, the situations they find themselves in are grounded in reality, and, for the most part, the dialogue feels natural and flows beautifully.

The four leads have a natural chemistry; the opening scene sees them ping-ponging one-liners and quick comebacks off of each other with real zeal—and then, in a move that I didn't expect, they are separated. Each character is sent out on his own journey, which, only in some cases, will cross with the paths the others have taken. It's a daring move by the filmmakers, and one that shows considerable guile, but ultimately it's a move that pays off and makes ***Palo Alto*** a richer experience. For while the four leads together are excellent, it is the interactions each has when out on his own that makes the movie what it is.

From heartbreak to the blossoming of new love, via the discovery of a newfound appreciation for those we take for granted, ***Palo Alto*** deals with some very real subjects and emotions. While each character's journey is well worth taking, I

found Nolan's story to be the most affecting. His chance encounter with the quirky (but not annoyingly so) Jaime (Autumn Reeser, *The O.C.*) provides the film with its sweetest moments and sees the normally awkward Nolan come out of his shell. It's to the credit of the writers, and the two young actors, that I was rooting for these two kids to get together. The other recurring character in Nolan's segments is Morgan, the local bus driver played by a never-better Tom Arnold (***True Lies***), who offers sage advice to the young man while he struggles to come to grips with his own love life.

Brad Leong's direction is unobtrusive, with the director happy to let the story flow naturally without feeling the need to stamp his mark all over it. So often first-time directors, perhaps understandably, feel they have to show everything they've got in their debut feature, making the movie feel more like a demo reel. Leong's more assured approach should be commended, as should the excellent screenplay that, like the direction, remains focused rather than showy.

The screener copy of ***Palo Alto*** sent for review suffered from a slightly washed out look. Some artifacting was also evident, but, as is usually the case, these problems should hopefully be cleared up for the final retail release. Being a dialogue heavy film the 5.1 soundtrack really had very little to do. For the most part the dialogue is clear, though the pop-rock soundtrack occasionally suffers, sounding a little muffled.

The disc sent for review was lacking any extras, though a visit to Image Entertainment's website does show a good-looking set of special features planned for the retail copy.

The Rebuttal Witnesses

Palo Alto isn't particularly original, its story is one we've seen and heard before in the likes of ***American Graffiti*** and ***American Pie***. Some of these similarities are acknowledged by the filmmakers, and in all fairness, ***Palo Alto*** never plagiarizes or comes close to being a mere imitation. Its characters and its execution set it apart from the crowd and see it stand as its own film.

Closing Statement

If you're looking for a teen movie with a little more than just gross-out humor to offer, but still has time to introduce the world to the concept of the "boobie leg," ***Palo Alto*** is the film you've been looking for.

The Verdict

Not guilty.

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