

# Serious slapstick

FROM accolades to abuse, *Tootsie* has stimulated a lot of comment. This lively story of an out-of-work actor who lands the female lead in a television soap opera brought with it a reputation as a highly successful and controversial film even before it opened in Britain.

Some have showered praise on Dustin Hoffman's performance, pipped at the post for the Oscars by Ben Kingsley in *Ghandi*, while others have criticised the film as anti-feminist or even anti-gay. Yet, in spite of all the talk, *Tootsie* is an entertaining and enjoyable film, well worth the

trip to the cinema.

Gently poking fun at both the theatrical establishment and the fringe, *Tootsie* opens as it means to continue — using a light-hearted, almost slapstick style to examine serious issues. When Michael starts work — as Dorothy — he suffers all the patronisation and aggravation that women face every day.

As a man, Michael is brash and arrogant, given to arguing with men and using women; as a woman he is gentle and concerned and puzzled by the high-handed manner in which men treat him (her?). This is no

crude portrayal of so-called female qualities but rather a process of a man discovering the more feminine side of himself and, one hopes, becoming a nicer and fuller human being.

Unlike the Jack Lemmon-Tony Curtis-Marilyn Monroe classic, *Some Like it Hot*, to which it has often been compared, *Tootsie* recognises the existence of machismo, tackling head-on the problems of male stereotyping. While neatly sidestepping the complications of lesbianism, as Michael falls for his co-star while in his female guise and homosexuality as he gets proposed to by a middle-aged man, *Tootsie* unashamedly looks at sexism from the male point-of-view.

Hilarious at times, *Tootsie* has a winning combination of style and acting. Alongside Dustin Hoffman, Jessica Lange, who did win an Oscar, gives one of her better performances and Teri Garr, also nominated, is convincing as the neurotic Sandy.

However, my personal Oscar would go to director Sydney Pollack who cast himself as Michael's increasingly exasperated agent. Turning Hoffman's own reputation as a difficult actor around, Pollack steals several scenes giving the film additional zest.



**EXTRA ZEST:** Director Sydney Pollack plays *Tootsie*'s agent