

Oklahoma Gazette

Documentary

Brutal Beauty: Tales of the Rose City Rollers

Rod Lott
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While I haven't yet had a chance to experience Oklahoma's burgeoning roller derby scene, I really want to after watching the documentary "Brutal Beauty: Tales of the Rose City Rollers."

Although casting its eye on a team in Portland, I assume the experiences are common to other cities and states. (I spotted a couple, including the fracturing of initial teams.)

Following colorful participants with more colorful monikers like Grace Lightning, Break Neck Bettie and Madame Bumpsalot, Chip Mabry's film is both an introduction to and a celebration of the oddball sport, which exudes a sort of gladiatorial-games appeal. We learn how the Rollers were formed, how the members choose their names, how they prepare for bouts, and just what the rules are, explained rather handily using fresh doughnuts.

You get plenty of glimpses of action, but it's the offscreen scenes that grant "Brutal Beauty" its heart. The doc shatters stereotypes as it shows the women's lives off the banked tracks, and they're like every other woman: a wife, a mom or a girlfriend, with family, jobs and other responsibilities. It also shows what they are not; as one puts it, "They're not a bunch of pussies."

Their dedication and determination is to be admired, as roller derby is indeed a sport of sheer athleticism, as the broken, hanging ankles attest. Anyone who disagrees should strap on some skates and go a round with the girls; I fear for you. —Rod Lott

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