

TELEVISION REVIEW

Love's Deadly Triangle: The Texas Cadet Murder

Generic title and cast virtually lacking big names may deter audiences from "Love's Deadly Triangle: The Texas Cadet Murder." Fact is, telepic is a well-told murder yarn, literally ripped from the front pages – subject was cover story of December 1996 issue of Texas Monthly.

Literalness is one of film's strong points, as Steve Johnson's strong teleplay leans heavily on facts of story – is this a first for "fact-based" TV movies?

Real-life scenario was a good one: Body of high school student Adrienne Jones was discovered at the side of a road, cause of death attributed to blows with a blunt instrument and two shots to

the head. Police question numerous subjects, eventually leading to arrest of and subsequent confession by least likely candidates: high school sweethearts Diane Zamora and David Graham, model students by then enrolled in Navy and Air Force academies, respectively. (Both are currently pleading innocence, and Graham's lawyers are said to be contesting validity of his lengthy and detailed confession. Still, Johnson's screenplay uses real names, with disclaimer at end of film.)

Discovery of Zamora and Graham's alleged guilt was delayed in part by arrest of more obvious culprit, creepy Bryan McMillan, a local pillhead known to harbor a crush on Zamora (he passed a polygraph test). Police were eventually led to real killers after Zamora confessed to friends that she'd "kill for love" and, in fact, had.

Holly Marie Combs and David Lipper (veterans of "Picket

Fences" and "Full House," respectively) are quite good as Zamora and Graham, appropriately underplaying under Richard Colla's direction. Cassidy Rae is seen briefly, but effectively, as victim Jones; and film's only "name" star, Dee Wallace Stone, even more briefly as Jones' mother.

Chad Carlberg is McMillan; Gary Grubbs and Kurt Fuller portray chief detectives with a bit of humor, somewhere between Jack Webb and Tommy Lee Jones. Nobody bothers to try a Texas accent.

Pace is steady without being hysterical, though jumping back and forth chronologically is handled uneasily at times.

Details largely follow those revealed in Texas Monthly piece, though interrogation of hapless McMillan may be hyped a bit here for dramatic purposes.

Tech credits are swell, allowing for Wilmington's lack of resemblance to a small town on the Dallas-Ft. Worth corridor.

-Todd Everett