

Looking for Eric

France/UK/Italy/Belgium/Spain

2009 Cert 15 116 mins

Crew

Director	Ken Loach
Screenplay	Paul Laverty
Cinematography	Barry Ackroyd
Editor	Jonathan Morris
Art Director	Julie Ann Horan
Music	George Fenton

Cast

Steve Evets	Eric Bishop
Eric Cantona	lui-même
John Henshaw	Meatballs
Stephanie Bishop	Lily
Gerard Kearns	Ryan Bishop
Lucy-Jo Hudson	Sam
Stefan Gumbs	Jess Bishop
Justin Moorhouse	Spleen

Synopsis

After family problems cause a car accident, postman Eric Bishop seeks solace in his lifesize poster of former Manchester United centre forward Eric Cantona. When the real Cantona materialises in his bedroom, the two discuss Bishop's life. He is still racked with guilt about abandoning his first wife Lily 20 years earlier, and Cantona orders him to visit her. Bishop finds evidence that his teenage son Ryan is involved in petty crime, and witnesses him being threatened by local gangster Zac. Bishop and Lily have their first heart-to-heart conversation in years, and he confesses to a panic attack following baby daughter Sam's christening.

On Cantona's advice, Bishop spring-cleans his life, throwing out lots of junk - and discovers a gun in Ryan's room. When Bishop and younger son Jess try to find Ryan, they witness the aftermath of a nightclub shooting. Ryan confesses that he's looking after Zac's gun, and can't go to the police because Jess has been threatened with retribution. Bishop remonstrates with Zac but is humiliated, not least when his encounter with Zac's Doberman is posted on YouTube. During a family reunion, Bishop's house is raided by armed police and everyone is arrested, though they are released after the police fail to find the well-hidden gun. Cantona advises Bishop to exploit Zac's fears.

abridged from *Sight & Sound*, Sept'09



Review

Seeing top-whack footballers at the Cannes film festival is becoming a bit of a tradition. Last year it was Diego Maradona, showing up for Emir Kusturica's macho movie tribute, *Maradona By Kusturica*. The year before it was Zinedine Zidane, the subject of Douglas Gordon and Philippe Pareno's *Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait*. Now it is the turn of Eric Cantona, the gnomic philosopher-king of 90s Man U, and now hero of Ken Loach's boisterous new picture; scripted by Paul Laverty, it is a lovably good-natured if erratic comedy about a depressed middle-aged postman and football fan called Eric.

Eric is stressed. He has to look after his stepsons from his failed second marriage, who are drifting into burglary and serious crime. When he takes his grandchild round to see his first wife Lily and realises that he is still in love with her, Eric takes refuge in his boys' supply of dope and a breakdown-cum-epiphany ensues. Steve is visited by his low-hairlined, barrel-chested hero, the only man who can help him out of his spiritual mess. Eric Cantona himself appears in his bedroom, offering some ferociously serious life coaching and some heavy-duty pensées, of the sort only he can deliver.

It's a bit like Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam*. This is *Kick It Like Eric*. (Or maybe *Kick Him Like Eric*.) The difference is that Woody had to make do with an actor who only looked like Humphrey Bogart. Ken Loach has got the real thing (played, as it says in the credits, by "lui-même"): Cantona is excellent comic value, although his accent is still a bit impenetrable, and it isn't easy to tell if he is speaking in French or English. We get a deeply enjoyable montage of Cantona goals, but when a saucer-eyed Eric asks the great man what was his best moment, Cantona replies that it was not a goal, but a pass: an inspired assist. From this, Cantona's pupil begins to learn the selfless values of friendship and community, and finds the road back to happiness. But the film takes a weird, and not entirely convincing lurch into darker territory: Eric's boys are involved in some very bad business, and threaten to drag their dad down with them. During this very grim stretch, Cantona is largely absent, only returning when Eric and his mates have between them cooked up a very unlikely plan for collective payback against the nasty local criminal who is making their lives a misery. It's frankly a pretty naive view of how to take revenge on a psychopathic gangster, though it reminded me, not unpleasantly, of something by the old Children's Film Foundation.

For Ken Loach fans, *Looking for Eric* will call to mind the uproarious football commentary scene from *Kes* or, perhaps in its great group comedy moments, his tremendous television film *The Navigators*. There are very nice performances from Evets and from John Henshaw as his mate Meatballs. The boy Loach has tucked away a nice goal with this film.

Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian* May 2009