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Film in Review



JOSH DOUGHTY/STARRY NIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Michael Shulman, left, and James Le Gros, the odd-couple lead characters in “Sherman’s Way,” directed by Craig Saavedra.

Like an annoying new puppy, “Sherman’s Way” just wants to run around in circles and lick your face. After a while, though — and against your better judgment — you kind of fall in love with it.

Not that either of this movie’s lead characters, an elitist Yalie and a washed-up Olympian, is particularly admirable. As Sherman, a recent law school graduate and uptight mama’s boy, Michael Shulman embodies the kind of preppy privilege that’s a liability almost anywhere but Manhattan. But it’s James Le Gros, playing a disgruntled former ski champion named Palmer, who finally pulls you in: his shaggy charm cushions both Sherman’s neuroses and the

script’s manipulations.

The pair meet when Sherman, stranded in California after an impetuous decision goes awry, needs a ride to an internship in Beverly Hills. Enter Palmer with a stolen MGB roadster, a carpe diem mentality and a character arc as visible as his immaturity.

Nevertheless the director, Craig Saavedra, generates surprising warmth from the familiar tropes of the odd-couple road movie. Shooting mostly in the verdant sweep of California’s wine country — and with a superb supporting cast — he allows Mr. Le Gros room to engage. Palmer may be an emotional infant but he can lick my face any time.

Opens Friday in Manhattan. Directed by Craig Saavedra