'Kiss Me Stupid' In A Wasteland

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A suave-looking man comes driving drunkenly along a lonely highway outside of Las Vegas. A cop at a roadblock waves him to stop.

"Sorry, Sir, there's a jam-up ahead. You'll have to take the detour and go through Climax."

The swarthy American-Italian looks up from his Italian-Italian white convertible and through his look-I'm-a-movie-star sunglasses and coos:

"Yeah, man, that's the only way to go."

Climax, Nevada is the highest point in the most recent attempt by Hollywood to capture the "Vast Wasteland" crown from television.

Study In Misery

"Kiss Me, Stupid" takes place, appropriately enough, in this little desert town and is a remarkable study in human misery (that is, if you consider the audience as human — the characters in this movie aren't.) As such, the film deserves an academy award — or more likely, an Emmy.

Anyhow, our hero (who, by the by, happens to be "the" Dean Martin) reaches Climax with an empty gas tank and is accosted in the ladies room of the filling station by a mercenary piano teacher who just happens to be whistling his latest idea for a hit song ("I'm a Poached Egg"). Dino, with rare presence of mind, flees the scene — only to find that the mechanic who filled his tank has disconnected his fuel line.

'Poached Eggs'

By the way — this mechanic is also the one who wrote the words to the song "I'm a Poached Egg." Oh joy.

At any rate — the movie continues — completely oblivious to the disastrous consequences of audiences retching in the aisles as Ray Walston coos to his wife, "I'm a swinger — I spend all my nights out at a bar drinking Mary Bloodies."

Enter Kim Novak (Polly the Pistol) with a rhinestone tastefully embedded in her naval — it seems she works at that bar which is picturesquely called "The Belly-Button" and she's been hired to play musical beds with Dino and Walston while Walston sells songs "I Left My Heart in Sandiego") to Martin.

Meanwhile, Walston (who is really not a swinger at all but a church organist in disguise) foists his wife off on her mother, whom he, in an accidently funny moment, pictures as something akin to Godzilla.

Wrestling Match

And while Dino and Kim wrestle on the living room floor, Ray's wife gets sick of Godzilla and is driven to drink at the Belly-Button where she ends up asleep in Kim's trailer until Dino comes in to get some "action" from the girl who he thinks is Polly (Walston succeeded in passing the real Polly off as his wife — that is, once she'd lost her navel). And so...

Tiresome is hardly the word. Smiles become grimaces as Billy Wilder succeeds in producing a catatonic state similar to that left by the academy awards production on TV.

Oh yes, it all ends happily — Dino sings one of Walston's songs. But at this happy ending Walston blubbers "But — But I just don't understand!"

Unfortunately, the audience — what there is left of it — does.