CAR 99 (Paramount, 1935) Directed by Charles Barton; produced by Bayard Veiller; Screenplay by C. Gardner Sullivan and Karl Detzer from stories by Detzer; Camera, William C. Mellor; 67 mins.

With: Fred MacMurray (Ross Martin); Ann Sheridan (Mary Adams); Sir Guy Standing (Professor Anthony); Frank Craven (Sheriff Pete Amiot); William Frawley (Sgt. Barrell); Louella Willcock (Miss Katon); John Cox (Recruit Carney); Eddie Chandler (Recruit Haynes); Alfred Del Cambre (Recruit Jamison); Nora Cecil (Granny); Marina Schubert (Nan); Joseph Sawyer (Whitey); Mack Gray (Smoke); Howard Wilson (Dutch); Charles Wilson (Police Captain); and Eddie Dunn, Peter Hancock, John Howard.

They turned them out smartly and efficiently back in the 30's. Shooting started on Dec.17 1934, and on February 22 "Car 99" opened at NY's Rialto Theatre to an excellent review from the NY Times and a comment that it was one of the best melodramas in ages. Although it is a "B" and a good one, it was sold rather smartly at the time. Fred MacMurray had zoomed to such sudden popularity as a result of his work with Claudette Colbert in "The Gilded Lily" that "Car 99" was rushed into release as an "A" picture, the advertising stressing both the MacMurray name and the film's relationship (a rather casual one) to the then current police drama. This may have disappointed on that score, since it's a rural actioner, something the ads played down. The delight of the "B" is that it so often delivers more than one has a right to expect, but as an "A" this might have delivered a little less. Today it hardly matters, as it's a brisk little film with a good deal of location work. Sections of the studio itself double as the Michigan State Police HQ, and there's a minimum of the obvious studio work that marred so many of the bigger Paramount films. There's no excruciating acting, but what there is is good and thoroughly enjoyable. Particularly good values are the supporting touches, much of it deliberately over-dramatised in keeping with the successful radio format from which it derived although, oddly, the sound track behind the credits tends to ridicule such dramatisation. The cast is interesting and solid, full of interesting people on the police force, not least the young and very appealing Ann Sheridan in one of the first of her leading lady roles, while some of the support roles are written with far more depth than one usually encounters in a "B". William Frawley, far from being stock comedy relief, actually turns in a rather noxious character which one could however do entirely without the Frank Craven character which is merely there to fill alongside the detective plot. Sir Guy Standing is his genial old self; familiarity with his performances and mannerisms makes them increasingly less effective, but he's such a delightful actor of the old school that one can't be too hard on him.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

JUKE GIRL (Warner Brothers, 1942) Directed by Curtis Bernhardt; produced by Hal B. Wallis; Assoc. Producer, Jerry Wald; Screenplay by A.I. Bezzerides from an original story by Theodore Pratt; Camera, Bert Glennon; Music by Adolph Deutsch; screen adaptation, Kenneth Gamet; 90 mins.

With: Ann Sheridan (Lola Mears); Ronald Reagan (Steve Talbot); Richard Whorf (Denny Frazier); George Tobias (Nick); Alan Hale (Tippee); Faye Emerson (Violet Murphy); Gene Lockhart (Henry Madden); Bert Noyes; Howard da Silva (Cully); Donald MacBride (Boomer); Charles King (Trukeys); Willard Robertson (Mr. Just); William Worrell (Joe-Mo); Fuzzy Knight (Ike Harper); Spencer Charters (Keeno); William B. Davidson (Paley); Frank Wilcox (Driver); Bill Haade (Watchman) and Irving Bacon.

"Juke Girl" is the kind of film that is always being contemptuously referred to (by people who know nothing about film) as a Ronald Reagan "B" movie. Of course it is nothing of the kind, being very much of an "A" movie (As and Bs indicating budget and importance, not necessarily quality!), and with Reagan having been out of "B"s for a couple of years. Ann Sheridan was still the bigger star - she gets the better billing, and the title refers to her, even though her role is fairly routine. Clearly the film was rushed into production rather hurriedly to cash in on the Sheridan-Reagan teaming in "King of the Row" earlier that year. Reagan was now a fairly big star at Warners, though he would always be in the B's and Sogarts, who got the plum roles. Nevertheless, he did rather better at Warners than Dennis O'Keefe did in a similar spot at MGM. The second Warner film to be directed by European refugee Bernhardt (whose German films "The Rebel" and "The Woman Men Tarnish For" we ran not too long ago), it is rather a formula job, easily made in a hurry because Warners merely had to rejuggle old plot elements and put a standard cast of wonderful old-timers through its standard paces. (Alan Hale replays his trucker role from "Valley of the Giants" and "Dodge City" as a truck driver. In the latter, he wrote "Thieves' Highway" and knew how to make a truck driver story, gives his upgraded pulp film "Racket Busters" before it, it's a crime melodrama masquerading as a social protest film, and it shouldn't be taken too seriously. But neither should it be derided because it's efficient rather than original. It moves constantly, it's funny and exciting, and just watching Alan Hale bellow or Gene Lockhart cringe is worth anybody's time and money in 1966! The title has relatively little to do with the plot, but since Sheridan's "They Drive By Night" was relatively recent, WB obviously wanted to steer clear of another truck-driving title! ———— Wm. K. Eversen