

= The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show =

" The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show " is the fourteenth episode of the eighth season of the animated television sitcom The Simpsons . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on February 9 , 1997 . In the episode , The Itchy & Scratchy Show attempts to regain viewers by introducing a hip new character named Poochie , whose voice is provided by Homer . The episode is largely self @-@ referential and satirizes the world of television production , fans of The Simpsons and the series itself . It was written by David X. Cohen , and directed by Steven Dean Moore . Alex Rocco is a credited guest voice as Roger Meyers , Jr. for the third and final time (having previously provided the character 's voice in " Itchy & Scratchy & Marge " and " The Day the Violence Died ") , and Phil Hartman guest stars as Troy McClure . Poochie would become a minor recurring character and Comic Book Guy 's catchphrase , " Worst episode ever , " is introduced in this episode . With " The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show " , the show 's 167th , The Simpsons surpassed The Flintstones in the number of episodes produced for a prime @-@ time animated series .

= = Plot = =

The ratings of the Itchy & Scratchy Show segment of the Krusty the Clown Show suddenly fail . Krusty orders the cartoon 's producer , Roger Meyers , to find a way to fix the sagging ratings , or else a Chinese cartoon will replace Itchy and Scratchy . Meyers decides to commission a focus group to discover why Itchy and Scratchy has lost its popularity .

Bart and Lisa participate in the study , by watching cartoons and answering the questions . However , things do not go very well , with the children in the focus group contradicting themselves when explaining what they want (they argue that Itchy and Scratchy should be both more realistic and more fantastical) . Eventually , Lisa says that there was nothing wrong with Itchy and Scratchy in the first place ; rather , the characters had simply lost their novelty , and with it , the impact they once had on their audience . Meyers thanks Lisa for " saving " Itchy and Scratchy , and decides that his cartoon 's salvation lies in a new character . He tells Krusty and his team of writers that this new character should be a dog with " attitude " , who will be called Poochie .

Bart and Lisa suggest Homer to have a go at voice acting when they read that there will be open auditions . Homer auditions to read for Poochie 's voice , and gets the part . He and June Bellamy , his fellow voice actor , make several publicity stops to promote Poochie , where Homer confronts the show 's hardcore fans . Homer invites all of his friends and relatives to the screening of the first Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show . However , the cartoon is full of clichés and asinine antics , and by emphasizing Poochie , contains none of the show 's trademark violence . Everyone except Homer finds the episode unimpressive . Meyers is forced to admit that Poochie 's debut was a dud , and he decides to get rid of the character .

Homer learns that Poochie will be killed off , and resolves to keep Poochie alive . At his next recording session , rather than reading from the script , he implores the audience , through lines that he wrote , to give Poochie a fair chance . The writing team is uninterested with Homer 's statement , and he is led to believe that the comments will be in the next cartoon . So , Meyers dubs the line " I have to go now . My planet needs me . " into the dialogue , and the animation cel containing Poochie is yanked out of view . A statement attesting to the dog 's demise (he died on the way back to his home planet) is hurriedly edited into the cartoon ; the in @-@ studio audience cheers wildly as Krusty promises that Poochie is gone for good and signs a law preventing him from ever returning . Homer feels betrayed but , after realizing he never got paid for his efforts , attributes the affair to the nature of show business .

Throughout the episode , a man named Roy comes to live with the Simpsons . When Lisa remarks that new characters are just a desperate effort to boost shows with low ratings , Roy appears out of nowhere . He has a few minor lines and calls Homer " Mr. S. "

= = Production = =

" The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show " was written by David S. Cohen and directed by Steven Dean Moore . The episode was conceived as a commentary on what it was like to work on a television show that had long been on the air , but was considered to be nearing its end . This was intended to show that The Simpsons could still be good after eight seasons , even though it no longer had the " shock value " it did in the early years . Before production of season 8 began , several executives at Fox suggested the staff add a new character to the show , who would live with the Simpsons on a permanent basis , in a bid to freshen up the series . The writers found the suggestion , usually considered a sign of desperation to boost a flagging series , amusing , therefore much of the episode revolves around this trope . Parallel to the episode 's main plot , where Poochie is introduced on The Itchy & Scratchy Show to boost its ratings , the writers inserted the one @-@ time character Roy , a college @-@ aged man who is shown to be living with the Simpsons , with no explanation as to his character or presence , as a reference to the executives ' proposal . Roy was originally conceived for the " Time and Punishment " segment of the season six episode " Treehouse of Horror V " , living with the Simpsons in one of the alternate realities , as a second , teenage son in the family .

Cohen 's initial vision for Poochie was that he would be annoying to fans because he was wealthy , aloof and unlikeable . In the episode 's DVD commentary he read his script for the first cartoon featuring Itchy , Scratchy , and Poochie :

As with other episodes centering on the production of The Itchy & Scratchy Show , such as " The Front " , the show 's staff are shown . Almost all of them are based on the actual staff of The Simpsons . In the first scene at the production table the person in the lower right corner , wearing a squid T @-@ shirt , is Cohen . On the left side , the furthest away is Bill Oakley with Josh Weinstein next to him . Next to Weinstein is George Meyer , who is the writer who speaks out and gets fired . The animator shown designing Poochie is supervising director David Silverman . As Silverman plays the tuba , one was drawn into the background of the scene . Other writers who appear include Dan McGrath , Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham , Donick Cary , Ron Hauge , Ned Goldreyer , and Mike Scully , who had to be added in later , as the animators " didn 't have his photo " from which to get an accurate likeness .

This episode also features the first mention of Comic Book Guy 's soon @-@ to @-@ be catchphrase " Worst . Episode . Ever . " , which was taken from the alt.tv.simpsons newsgroup .

= = Themes = =

This episode saw The Simpsons surpass The Flintstones for the number of episodes produced for an animated series . The episode therefore deals with the issue of longevity and the problems that arise when the producers try to make a show ? fresh ? again .

The show mainly deals with themes commonly known as " jumping the shark " , instances that usually occur when a failing show adds a new character or twist to boost ratings . The first theme is a commentary on adding a new character , when the show has run for too long . Usually , this is a technique used in shows that involve children , who have grown up . This was the case in " Oliver " in The Brady Bunch or " Luke " on Growing Pains . Both Poochie and Roy are used to reflect this , by attempting to keep The Itchy and Scratchy Show and the Simpson family fresh respectively .

Another theme is the notion of network executives forcing ideas onto a show . The interaction between the writers and the network executives in the episode underscore the differences between them . The writers understand the show 's inner workings , but the network executives approach improvements to the show from a business point of view . They try to incorporate what they see as a rebellious character with the comment " This is popular with the kids " , but the viewers later reject the character . The writers themselves are satirized in the episode , and are depicted as lazy and pretentious with few original ideas .

The last theme is the viewer backlash and obsession with internal consistency . When Comic Book Guy sees the Poochie episode , he immediately goes on the Internet and writes " Worst episode ever " on a message board ; a commentary on how the active audience nit picks the episode . The writers respond by using the voice of Bart :

Bart : Hey , I know it wasn 't great , but what right do you have to complain ?

Comic Book Guy : As a loyal viewer , I feel they owe me .

Bart : What ? They 're giving you thousands of hours of entertainment for free . What could they possibly owe you ? I mean , if anything , you owe them !

Comic Book Guy : ... Worst episode ever .

Earlier in the episode Homer and June Bellamy attend an in @-@ store appearance as part of the promotion for the new character Poochie . They are asked a question of internal consistency , like the show 's fans do all the time ; Homer says to the fan who asks the question , " Why would a man whose shirt says ' Genius at Work ' spend all his time watching a children 's cartoon show ? " This is again a reflection on how the writers feel about the fans obsessing about internal consistency .

= = Cultural references = =

The original opening couch gag shows a pastiche of the cover collage from The Beatles ' 1967 album Sgt Pepper 's Lonely Hearts Club Band , which was first used earlier in the season in " Bart After Dark " . Otherwise , the episode refers to other TV shows , including the syndicated couch gag featuring the Flintstone family , recycled from the season 4 episode " Kamp Krusty " , to mark The Simpsons surpassing The Flintstones as the longest @-@ running animated series . Roy calls Homer and Marge Mr. and Mrs. S , which echoes Fonzie calling the Cunninghams " Mr. and Mrs. C " on Happy Days . Later , he decides to move in with " two sexy ladies " , recalling Jack Tripper in Three 's Company . Homer hiding in the closet to hear what the network executives were planning to do with Poochie is a reference to Jay Leno reportedly eavesdropping on a conversation between NBC executives on whether he or David Letterman would replace Johnny Carson as the host of The Tonight Show .

Itchy and Scratchy are based on Tom and Jerry and other cat @-@ and @-@ mouse cartoons . As a boy , series creator Matt Groening and his friends would fantasize about an ultra violent cartoon and how much fun it would be to work on a show like that . June Bellamy is a parody of voice actress June Foray . In the episode , Bellamy claims that she provided the " Beep , beep " sound effect in the Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner cartoons ; in reality the phrase was voiced by Paul Julian .

= = Reception = =

This episode was placed 23rd on Entertainment Weekly 's top 25 The Simpsons episodes list . Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , the authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , praised " The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show " , calling it " a very neat episode which , like " The Front " , is a good parody of the cartooning business . " In 2007 , Vanity Fair named it the sixth @-@ best episode in the show 's history , describing it as " a classic satire of network influence , obsessed TV fans , and programs that survive long after the shark has been jumped , the episode is a meta @-@ celebration , a tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek rebuttal to everyone who claimed that the quality of The Simpsons had declined over the years . " Todd Gilchrist called it a masterpiece , stating it " could easily be packaged and sold by [itself] . " Planet Simpson author Chris Turner describes the episode as " the most contentious and direct counterattack The Simpsons ever unleashed on its fans " and " [harsh] satire of the working world of big @-@ time TV production " . Robert Canning of IGN said it was " laugh @-@ out @-@ loud funny " and describing the introduction of Roy as " a hilarious parody of a classic , overused television device . " Alan Sepinwall of The Star Ledger , in a review printed two days after the episode originally aired , praised the writers for not airing a " very special " episode to celebrate the milestone of overtaking The Flintstones . He noted " [the episode is] so self @-@ aware it put the best in @-@ jokes on St. Elsewhere to shame . " The BBC named it as one of the ten most memorable episodes of the show , noting " the writers used the opportunity to pay tribute to the art of animation and rail against network interference in their show . " In 2014 , The Simpsons writers picked " The Beagle Has Landed " as one of their nine favorite " Itchy & Stratchy " episodes of all

time .

In its original American broadcast , " The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show " finished tied for 38th place in the weekly ratings for the week of February 3 ? 9 , 1997 with a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 8 . It was the third @-@ highest @-@ rated show on the Fox Network that week .

Comic Book Guy 's phrase " Worst . Episode . Ever " was named by The A.V. Club as a quote that could be used in everyday life , as well as being one of the most popular quotes from the show .