

= Maximum Homerdrive =

" Maximum Homerdrive " is the seventeenth episode of The Simpsons ' tenth season . It first aired on the Fox network in the United States on March 28 , 1999 . In the episode , Homer challenges trucker Red Barclay to a meat eating contest , which Barclay is the long @-@ standing champion of . Barclay wins , but quickly dies of " beef poisoning " , making it the first time Barclay will miss a shipment . Feeling bad for him , Homer takes on the duty of transporting Barclay 's cargo to Atlanta , with his son Bart by his side .

" Maximum Homerdrive " was written by John Swartzwelder and directed by Swinton O. Scott III . Although the episode 's first draft was written by Swartzwelder , the writing staff was split into two groups in order to focus on both the A @-@ story and the B @-@ story . The episode features references to comedian Tony Randall , model Bettie Page , and science fiction film 2001 : A Space Odyssey , among other things .

In its original broadcast , " Maximum Homerdrive " received a 7 @. @ 8 Nielsen rating among adults between ages 18 and 49 , the highest such rating for the series since " Wild Barts Can 't Be Broken " . Variety credited the boost in ratings to the premiere of Futurama , which aired after " Maximum Homerdrive " . Following the tenth season 's home video release , the episode received mixed reviews from critics .

= = Plot = =

Lisa announces that she is going to protest a new steakhouse which allows its customers to kill their own steak , which is called " The Slaughterhouse " ( it is also decorated with hanging steer carcasses and a fountain of blood , and everything on the menu is meat - even the menu itself ) . Homer hears the name of the steakhouse and is astonished that nobody told him about what he thinks is an amazing place , and takes the rest of his family to eat there , where he enters a challenge with a friendly truck driver named Red Barclay . The challenge Homer and Red enter revolves around who will finish off a " Sir Loins @-@ A @-@ Lot " first , a 16 lb ( 256 ounce or 7 @. @ 26 kg ) steak that only two people in the history of The Slaughter House have finished ( Red being one and Tony Randall being the other ) . The gargantuan steak is more than a match for Homer , as for once in his life he is unable to finish his food and breaks down crying . Red does , but dies seconds later of what Dr. Hibbert called " beef poisoning " . This shocks the diners , before he reassures them that it was " probably from some other steakhouse " ( Coincidentally informing the Simpsons beforehand that he owns a fair percentage of the steakhouse ) . Homer then decides to finish Red 's last delivery and brings Bart along with him , leaving the rest of the family behind .

Lamenting that Homer and Bart always get to go on exciting adventures , Marge says " Maybe it 's time we took a walk on the wild side . " However , she , Lisa , and Maggie end up going to a doorbell store to buy a doorbell that they install themselves , which plays The Carpenters ' song " ( They Long to Be ) Close to You " . Lisa wants to press the doorbell , but Marge insists that they should let visitors do the ringing first . Unfortunately , they barely get any visitors and they never get to ring for various reasons ( Milhouse is trying to sell birdseeds , but is attacked by birds , some Jehovah 's Witnesses were about to ring the doorbell when they reconsider their careers ) . Marge desperately tries to order garlic bread from Luigi 's to get someone to ring the doorbell , but unfortunately the delivery man , who is Wiseguy , prefers to knock on the door and leaves when he hears that Marge is not interested in the garlic bread . Finally , Lisa gets fed up and rings the doorbell herself . However , the new doorbell starts to malfunction , playing the song over and over without stopping .

Meanwhile , Homer goes to get some pills that will keep him awake overnight . He takes an entire bottle of pep pills , followed by a bottle of sleeping pills to balance it out . In the truck , he alternates between being hyper to being drowsy until he finally falls asleep at the wheel , almost heading off a cliff . The next morning , he awakes to discover a secret : the truck drove by itself with its Navitron Autodrive system . He talks it over with other drivers , who inform him that he should not mention anything about the truck driving by itself . The truck 's Autodrive system also helps keep itself safe . To demonstrate the system , Homer and Bart sit on the hood . A passing bus notices this , and

Homer outright tells them about the autodrive system and its nature as a secret scam . Another truck driver notices this and informs the other truckers about the situation .

Back in Springfield , Marge tries to cut the wires to the doorbell , but discovers that Homer has stolen her tools , so she decides to just pull the wires out , but makes it worse by making the doorbell to speed up and amplify itself , disturbing the whole neighborhood .

Homer and Bart are enjoying themselves until an angry mob of truckers get in a showdown with Homer , and he survives without the help of the Autodrive system , which had ejected itself from the truck by managing to get the truck to jump over the others . The truckers briefly consider giving up scamming before deciding just to bootleg Beanie Babies . Homer and Bart finish the shipment of Artichokes and migrant workers by taking it to Atlanta , but they still need transport home . The Lord provides one , as a freight train full of napalm headed back to Springfield needs a driver ( as the original driver had quit because he didn 't want to deliver a train full of napalm to Springfield ) .

Back at the Simpson house , the doorbell 's tune grows so annoying that an angry crowd has gathered . Chief Wiggum is about to shoot it until the doorbell store 's mascot , Señor Ding Dong , uses his whip to silence the noise from the doorbell . Everyone in Springfield is thankful for him , and Señor Ding @-@ Dong attempts to make a dramatic exit , but his Chevrolet van is malfunctioning and he is instead forced to ask for jumper cables .

= = Production = =

" Maximum Homerdrive " , originally called " Homer the Trucker " , was written by staff writer John Swartzwelder and directed by Simpsons director Swinton O. Scott III . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on March 28 , 1999 . The meat @-@ eating contest seen in the beginning of the episode was conceived by Simpsons writer Donick Cary during a story pitch @-@ out , according to writer and executive producer Matt Selman . When rewriting the episode , the writing staff was divided into two groups , so that one group wrote the A @-@ story , while the other wrote the B @-@ story . After the second act , the writers were " stuck " , as executive producer and former showrunner Mike Scully recalled in the DVD commentary for the episode . Eventually , staff writer and co @-@ executive producer George Meyer pitched the idea that the truckers would have " a secret device , that actually did all the driving for them " , called the Navitron Autodrive System .

In the season 10 deleted scenes where Homer turns on the radio listening to a song about a trucker who crashed his truck out on I @-@ 95 , and one more where some of the truckers try to flatten Homer 's truck . In order to animate Barclay 's truck in " Maximum Homerdrive " , Scott bought a model truck , which he also based the design of Barclay 's truck on . According to storyboard consultant Mike B. Anderson , the trucks in the episode were very difficult to animate , as the Simpsons animators were still working with traditional cel animation at the time and did not have access to computer tools . In a scene in The Slaughterhouse , an employee is shown killing a number of cows with a captive bolt pistol , however the death of the cows are not shown . Originally , the writers wanted to show the cows being killed , however when Scott saw the scene in the storyboards , the Simpsons staff instead decided to make the deaths " indirect " . During the meat eating contest , Homer becomes exhausted and sees two wine glass holding cows , who appear as " wavy " figures . In order to achieve the " wavy " effect , the Simpsons animators put a ripple glass on the cels and moved it around while shooting the scene . After the contest , Barclay dies of " beef poisoning " . The Fox censors were uneasy with including any mention of " beef poisoning " in the episode , as talk show host Oprah Winfrey had recently been sued by " some Texas ranchers " for defaming the beef industry . In a scene in the episode , Homer buys a jar of " Stimu @-@ Crank " pills in order to stay alert while driving during the night . He swallows all the pills at once , to the clerk 's dismay . Homer replies , " No problem , I 'll balance it out with a bottle of sleeping pills " , and proceeds to swallow an entire jar 's worth of sleeping pills . According to Scully , the censors had " a lot of trouble " with the scene , but it was included anyhow .

When Homer turns on the truck radio , the song " Wannabe " by the Spice Girls can be heard . Originally , a " trucker song " about " a horrible wreck out on old 95 " would be heard . The song was a reference to the " Wreck of the Old 97 " , a famous locomotive that crashed in 1903 and inspired

the country ballad of the same name . It was sung by main cast member Dan Castellaneta , included mentions of " scraping blood and guts off the road " and was eventually dropped because it was considered too gruesome by the staff . The song was later included as a deleted scene on The Simpsons - The Complete Tenth Season DVD box set . While eating dinner at Joe 's Diner , " 12 Bar Blues " by NRBQ ( a band that Mike Scully was fond of ) can be heard playing from a jukebox . According to producer Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham , the doorbell tune in the episode " has a history with The Simpsons " , as it is also Homer and Marge 's wedding song . " Maximum Homerdrive " features the first appearance of Señor Ding @-@ Dong , who is a recurring character in the series . He is portrayed by Castellaneta , the voice behind many characters . Red Barclay , the trucker who dies of " beef poisoning " in The Slaughterhouse , was portrayed by regular cast member Hank Azaria , who voices many characters in the series . Barclay 's voice is slightly based on that of American actor Gary Busey . The two Jehovah 's witnesses were portrayed by Pamela Hayden and Karl Wiedergott .

= = Themes and cultural references = =

In Voyages of Discovery : A Manly Adventure in the Lands Down Under , a book about adventuring and masculinity , Ken Ewell described " Maximum Homerdrive " as a " fine example " of " the poor man 's lack of travel acumen " . He wrote " Homer 's usual ineptitude at first spells disaster for the duo , at least until they find out about the truck 's auto @-@ drive system . And though he promises to keep the device a secret , Homer can 't keep his mouth shut , and so shamefully exposes to the world his un @-@ manful behavior concerning the mates . So given that Homer once again learns absolutely nothing from his traveling experience , he can only take to heart the thoughts of the British writer Stephen Fry . ' At my age travel broadens the behind . ' "

The decal on Homer 's truck reads " Rex Rascal " , a reference to American animator Tex Avery . In the steak restaurant , a photo of actor and comedian Tony Randall can be seen next to Barclay 's photo . Homer 's postcard , which reads " Wish you were her " , shows a picture of American model Bettie Page . In the scene where Homer drives Barclay 's truck into the convoy , Navitron Autodrive System says " I 'm afraid I can 't let you do this , Red . The risk is unacceptable . " The line , as well as the Navitron Autodrive System 's , is a reference to HAL 9000 , the antagonist in the 1968 science fiction film 2001 : A Space Odyssey . The episode also references media mogul Ted Turner , with a sign that reads " Atlanta : the home of Ted Turner 's mood swings " . The title of the episode references the infamous 1986 Stephen King movie Maximum Overdrive , which was one of Simpsons cast member Yeardley Smith 's first credited screen roles .

= = Release and reception = =

In its original American broadcast on March 28 , 1999 , " Maximum Homerdrive " received a 9 @.@ 4 rating / 15 percent share , according to Nielsen Media Research , meaning it was seen by 9 @.@ 4 percent of the population and 15 percent of the people watching television at the time of its broadcast . Among adults between ages 18 and 49 , the episode received a 7 @.@ 8 rating / 20 percent share , the strongest rating The Simpsons had in the demographic since " Wild Barts Can 't Be Broken " , which aired on January 17 the same year . Tom Bierbaum of Variety credited the boost in ratings to the premiere of Futurama , which aired after " Maximum Homerdrive " , writing that " Sunday 's Futurama preview energized Fox 's entire lineup " that night . On August 7 , 2007 , " Maximum Homerdrive " was released as part of The Simpsons - The Complete Tenth Season DVD box set . Matt Groening , Mike Scully , George Meyer , Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham , Ron Hauge , Matt Selman , Swinton O. Scott III and Mike B. Anderson participated in the DVD 's audio commentary of the episode .

Following its home video release , " Maximum Homerdrive " received mixed reviews from critics . James Plath of DVD Town described it as " funny , " and Brian Tallerico of UGO Networks considered it to be one of the season 's best episodes , describing it as having " some awesome road comedy . " Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood of I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better

Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide gave the episode a positive review as well , writing " The life of the trucker , as made popular in C. W. McCall 's 1976 hit single " Convoy " , is brought to life here in all its glory . For once , Homer is in the right and you cannot help but cheer as the truckers spectacularly fail to stop him getting to Atlanta . " They concluded by writing " A nice , bonding story for Homer and Bart which is diametrically opposed to the one featuring Marge and Lisa . " On the other hand , giving the episode a more mixed review , Colin Jacobson of DVD Movie Guide wrote " If nothing else , ' Homerdrive ' takes unanticipated paths . The eating contest leads to a long truck drives leads to that ' shocking secret ' . All of this means the show manages to become pretty unpredictable . " However , he maintained that the episode is only " sporadically " funny , and that it " doesn't ever excel in that department ? at least not in terms of the trucker story . " He enjoyed the episode 's B @-@ story more , because of its " absurdity " , however he criticized the inclusion of Gil in the episode , calling the character " increasingly overused " . Jake McNeill of Digital Entertainment News gave the episode a mixed review as well , writing that it " may have been a fairly decent episode but for the fact that something similar was done ( and done better ) on King of the Hill . "