

“Oh sure, first you ignore my opening statement and NOW you steal my exposition!” “You say something, Double X?” “sigh...” Then misty’s all “Hey lady do you have asbestos underwear or something?” and lara’s all “Oh no, they went out in the pioneer days, it turns out if the ponyta actually LIKE you, they can control whether the flames burn you! Boy, was ol’ grandpappy laramie’s face red!” And ash is all “so they only burn you if they don’t trust, you, right?” And lara’s all “that’s... right, ash, I- Ash what in the hay are you-” And ash is like “so if I touch this mane...” “yes, ash?” “and it doesn’t trust me...” “yes ash and that takes a long time...” “I won’t get burned?” “yes ash, now just repeat that back to me for kicks, okay? If ponyta trusts you...” “if ponyta trusts me... I won’t get burnt?” “and...?” “and if it DOESN’T trust me... I will get burnt?” “whew! Think he finally got it-” “WAAAGH!” “consarn it boy, you’re as slow as a crustle that’s been cemented into a wall ain’tcha?” “Oh just let him, it’s the only way he’ll learn...”

So after that Lara’s all “hey you know what? Not everyone can just walk off second degree burns like that...” they tingle more than electrical burns but the same basic principles apply! ”so why don’t you come to the absolutely not japanese party/festival thing we’re having before the big race!” and ash is all “a competition that doesn’t involve traditional battling? I could actually win it!” but then a herd of dodrio from the rival farm run over and Link from Breath Of the Wild here (Seriously it’s the exact same outfit! Pokemon should totally sue Ninten... wait) says basically. “Hogswabbin’ chitlin’ gravy, I sure do love being evil and southern! Evening, ma’am, I’ll be your irredeemable bully for the episode. See y’all at the race where I’ll totally defy convention and win!” and lara’s all “wait, what’re you doing runnin’ your pokemon on Laramie land?” and dario’s all “Evil...! Yeehaw!”

We then join the good guys as they enjoy a traditional southern county fair complete with Kentucky okonomiyaki vendors, Louisiana taiyaki and traditional mississippi music! But the homestyle county atmosphere is interrupted by a stampede at the ranch! After Lara pulls off a mount worthy of legolas, they find that someone cast brawl on the tauros, only for them to immediately stop for no reason. Then Lara’s ponyta is spooked and throws her on her rear, which of course breaks her arm. Yeah alright you could break your arm from that position but I couldn’t tell that on first viewing. Any way ash grabs ponyta by the reigns in a manner that he could not have chosen more poorly to protect his internal organs and Lara’s all “that kid should be dead three times over, ponyta should have shredded his face right off the animation cel by now! Hey ash, why don’t you take my place considering the light of arceus seems to shine out of your pain threshold?” and ash’s all “What could go wrong? Sign me up!” And lara’s all “great! Speaking of pain thresholds have you ever ridden bareback before?” “whatback?” “oh sugar, bless your buttocks...”

So now after one night of rider training ash is riding a “horse” professionally! Along with misty... and brock... hey what are you guys doing here, I thought you wanted Lara to win! Come to think of it, apart from friendship why is her winning such a big deal anyway? She’s already part of the clan, she doesn’t need a membership! “She’s a strong female character, and I’m all about that! she’s a female character, and I’m all about that!” That’s fine but then WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO BEAT HER REPRESENTATIVE? Hey wait, pikachu?! What are you even doing, you’re

faster than squirtle! And what would even happen if you won, the laramie clan would take in a pokemon as a family member? And if pokemon can compete on their own, why are their even riders here? Why can't they just race them like greyhounds, it'd certainly be easier on this guy if that was the case! Oof.... Hang on lemme lie down for a minute...

ALright, so as I was saying we see ash and the gang are taking part in the big race, apparently MC'd by the nearest pirate they could find, but not before we see that Dario is working in cahoots with oh hi team rocket! It seems dario's even more irredeemable than we first thought, and has paid team rocket to sabotage the race. At least I assume he's paying them but with team rocket you never know... That established, let the wacky races begin!

And to be honest, this is freaking awesome sequence. There's tons of variety, intense situations and james gives us a pun so groanworthy in turns in on itself and becomes awesome.

"What's a bull?"

Eventually though, after this guy completely defies the laws of physics by being able to somehow run backwards at the same speed as the electrode is moving forwards, Team rocket reveal themselves for no reason but not before they commit manslaughter by inciting said elecrobe to explode in the trainers immediate vicinity.

He is in 12 separate body bags now.

Anyway after that they defeat team rocket and unrealistically catch up to dodrio for the neck-and-neck... and neck and neck finish. It looks bad,Ponyta goes super saiyan but dario's dodrio pecks the air in front of ponyta's head with disorients it for some reason and then...

Not only did ponyta evolve it looks like ash evolved too! Seriously, he was part of that white light, too! Perhaps this is when he was anointed as the chosen one... well ash reaches the GOOL by a nose/horn/beak, Dario gets his comeuppance and he's all "boo-hoo, mama...!" and lara's all "good job, ash! You've saved the clan from letting in another outsider! And Ash is all "hahaha... I can't feel my legs."

Thoughts

Despite my heavy ribbing, this was a ton of fun. To be honest, when I was a kid I didn't care about kids and their education or a fascinating parable about abusive relationships, I was just in it for awesome monsters doing awesome things, and this episode delivered on that desire in spades. Fun, frenetic and full of variety.

One thing I'd really like to point out, though, is that this episode show how to do a slow build up properly. Two episodes ago, there was an intriguing premise but it was let down not only by a flimsy plot, but that it spent so much time on fluff that when the resolution came along, not only

was it rushed, coming a mere five minutes before the credits, it felt like a letdown on what was seemingly promised at the beginning. In this episode, however, they use the fluff time to establish the location and build up the exciting event that was about to take place, and when we actually get to the event, HALF WAY THROUGH, just enough time to hold it off for suspense while still giving it room to breathe when it happens, they try to make it as exciting and varied as possible. They could have easily just made it a race consisting entirely of ponyta, but throwing in the likes of onix and electrode led to some great, even tense situations and some awesome set pieces. Good structure and pacing, even if the story itself could use some work.

Speaking of which, of course the episode isn't perfect, the plot holes can be distracting if hilarious at times, ash doesn't really learn anything except that he's apparently the ponyta whisperer, the animation was somewhat inconsistent with some lame visual gags and poor quality posing but on the other hand it had some areas where the animation was beautifully smooth and it debuted one of my absolute favorite poses in the show, Jessie's one right here. I hate it when the show has such good and such bad in the technicals, especially when my favourite animation team of Yuji Asada and Akihiro Tamagawa is involved, but all I can really do is split the difference. Make up your mind! The other less than ideal aspect is that the dubbing can be noticeably clunky and subpar, and that's not even mentioning the accents!

So although the cons CAN be distracting alongside the pros, I can't deny that it was a really fine ride and paced well enough that it reached an emotional high and a satisfying conclusion. Again, It's the kind of episode I'd tune in for as a kid. I'll give it a B-.

Trivia

I gotta treat for you guys this week, but before that I have to mention that this was the most watched episode of Pokemon. Ever. No you didn't mishear that, apparently this above-average filler episode has received higher TV ratings than any other episode in the series at 18.6% in Japan, and no one seems to have any idea why. It's just one of those things. I'm just glad it was a Yuji Asada episode, even if it was one of his weaker ones.

4kids were strangely restrained in many areas of this episode, especially here where they actually made something sound MORE violent than the Japanese version! When Misty is rebuking Team Rocket, she says

Whereas in Japanese she merely says that they 'hurt' Lara's arm rather than broke it. Pretty weird how inconsistent that company could be, they even left in the distinctively Japanese song, Pokemon Ondo, in the dub! Was it opposite day again?

Now then, Ponyta is a facsimile of a horse, right? So you would expect it to obey the same basic rules as horses in the real world, correct? Well! It turns out they, uh...they got a lot of things wrong about how horses work. Thanks to my horse-crazy sister-in-law, here's a list of where they screwed up!

1. If you are riding the horse casually you should not be holding the reigns the way Lara is here. You are meant to keep your hands to your side so that you don't yank them, just tap them.
2. The harness Ponyta wears doesn't have a bit, however bitless bridles do exist. What DOESN'T exist is a bridle that doesn't have a throat latch! Otherwise there's nothing stopping it from flying right off!
3. The way Ponyta was spooked by Meowth here is actually realistic, too bad it's off set by the fact that it stays in the air way longer than a pony should be able to and horses mainly deal with perceived threats by shredding them with their front hooves, so I wasn't exaggerating when I said Ash should be dead. Also a frightened horse would have bolted way sooner.
4. A funny one here is that nearly every time the horse nickers, it's actually making the "feed me noise.:" this undercuts some of the emotional moments when you know this. "Feed me." "Food" "Why am I not fed."
5. Lastly, when Ash is trying to calm Ponyta down here after the electrode explosion, he's yanking on the reigns. This is almost literally the worst thing he could do aside from maybe stabbing it, as it would be like grabbing someone by the shoulders and shaking them back and forth while screaming "DON'T PANIC!!!"

They were at least good at showing the proper jockey position when Ash was racing but his thighs would have been freaking jelly at the end due to his inexperience. Overall it wasn't too horrendous, but maybe a little more research would have been called for.

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(photos)

And so, Suede rides off the winners mound and into sunset, high off the awesome events he witnessed. But on the horizon there's a conflict that will probably knock him off that high horse...