As wide and sprawling as the open sea can be, it can also be a prison, and a boat’s claustrophobic confines and lack of escape possibilities are only made worse when a shipmate is as unstable as a broken canoe. Such is the case in the SXSW feature CAUGHT INSIDE.

Hailing from Australia, the source of the seafaring tension of DEAD CALM, CAUGHT INSIDE sees a small group of buds venture far off into the ocean on a surfing adventure. The “no girls” rule is swiftly bent as Toob’s (Simon Lyndon) girlfriend Alex (Leeanna Walsman) and her mate Samantha (Daisy Betts) join the crew, and Bobby (Sam Lyndon) and surfing legend The Bull (Ben Oxenbould) vye for the latter’s affection. Bull, however, takes his efforts to mean-spirited and horrifying heights.

What works is the film’s ensemble acting and easy-hangout vibe for much of its early running time. So many horror and thrillers take the “Bunch of kids. Go…” template and create something completely unrelatable. CAUGHT INSIDE’s cast is not only relatively likable, but thankfully believable. They aren’t someone’s misguided idea of what a batch of young ’uns act and sound like, and it’s refreshing that they have a goal and common interest in surfing instead of a shallow vacation of vices where every other line of dialogue revolves around “the party.”

Unfortunately, director Adam Blaiklock doesn’t back up his ensemble, crafting a film devoid of much style or tension throughout. Oxenbould really puts his all into the clearly malicious brute that is Bull, but the filmmaker’s mostly point-and-shoot aesthetic (aside from some nicely done surfing imagery) just leaves much of the film, especially its draggy climax, flat.

CAUGHT INSIDE doesn’t add much to the trapped-at-sea subgenre, but if its stylistic side had matched its actors’ potential, it probably could’ve been a solid entry nonetheless. Instead, it just doesn’t leave much of an impression.

{jcomments on}