

the town's self-regarding nostalgia and even more in the folksy warmth embodied in the character of Moses, the police officer who's also enforcing official organized religion. She makes a strong appearance at a scene of violence—short, crafty, brutal, hate-filled—at the race track, which Tregenza nonetheless films, however incongruously, with a ravishing sense of nature-engulfed grandeur. That's why "Fast", for all its aesthetic exaltation of daily wonder, also affirms another dimension of a spiritual quest: a feeling of "fuck you" to the narrowness of small-town life.

Tregenza's imagistic fury doesn't come at the expense of drama; his choreography is never reduced to a stunt, and the cast never appear constrained by the demands of timing and blocking. As Sterling, Pankey strides with calm assurance but talks with an ingenuousness that seems spurred by renewed contact with home. The men exude contentious authority in various ways, from the grandee's circumspect command and Uncle Jeb's sly omniscience to the mechanic's viperish resentment and Billy's acerbic flirtation. The dialogue is terse, expressive, confessional, pugnacious; the actors' voices and manner, their controlled tones and gestures, all suggest the endurance, in small-town isolation, of the mind set of bygone days.

Several symbolic scenes, similarly unfolding in sinuous long takes—a ritualistic repetition of local habits at the junk yard, a formal dance of non-seduction at a luncheonette with a jukebox—lay bare the town's ingrained and unyielding mores. A climactic, boldly inventive flourish of reminiscence, as Sterling tangibly revisits her past, blends virtuosity with a revelation: the quest for speed on the racetrack runs the risk of merely going around in circles. "Fast" may be Tregenza's breakout film in more than one way. ♦

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ABOUT THE FILM

Rob Tregenza has worked at the leading edge of American independent cinema since his 1988 debut *Talking to Strangers*, a film built entirely from extended single-take sequences shot in nine locations across the city of Baltimore. His subsequent films—including *Inside/Out* (1997), *Gavagai* (2016), and *The Fishing Place* (2024)—constitute a body of work defined less by narrative than by the physical weight of recorded reality. Largely self-financed and operating outside the festival-circuit economy, he remains one of the few American filmmakers whose practice has more in common with Straub-Huillet or Chantal Akerman than with anything produced in the American independent mainstream.

Tregenza’s sixth feature returns to the American South—shot on location in Lexington and Richmond, Virginia—after his Norwegian excursions in *Gavagai* and *The Fishing Place*. Says Tregenza: “For Sterling (Madison Pankey), a sort of present day Alice, the graveyard Lotus she redeems becomes a totem, a saturated phenomenon permitting her to move freely in time on a phantom road. It is a sort of Ford but never a DeLorean. A Southern woman with a fair deal of historical baggage and deep secrets, Sterling journeys back to her rural home, the Lotus takes her through the shadow of the valley into the adjoining worlds of the living and the dead. Desiring to become an F1 driver, Sterling must go fast/hard, against/through all tunnels imagined or concrete.” *Screening to be followed by a prerecord interview with Tregenza and Jonathan Rosenbaum.*

TRT: 96 min

In person: Madison Pankey

Fast by Richard Brody

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published by the New Yorker, August 11, 2026

An influential notion in art-house filmmaking is that of slow cinema: long takes and spare action that emphasize the real duration of onscreen events. It’s a term I avoid, because what matters more than speed of action is speed of thought. Movies made up of quick cuts and onscreen turbulence, such as “The Odyssey” and “Superman,” may look fast, but they dole out ideas and emotions at the cautious pace of children’s books. By contrast, the new film by Rob Tregenza, “Fast”—ninety-six minutes of cinema made in rural Virginia with no more than a few dozen long takes, a small batch of main characters, and plenty of walking and talking—dazzles the mind with the speed and spectrum of inner experience it evokes. It delights the eye with the startling originality and the sensuous grace and grandeur of its images, settings, and performances.

The movie’s title is no joke. “Fast” is set in the world of low-rent auto racing. Its protagonist, a young woman named Sterling (Madison Pankey), tries to carve out a place in the sport on the local track near her home town. She has recently returned there after an extended absence, and her life in the town is built on bones and haunted by death. Her childhood was shadowed by the loss of both her father—by suicide, it is hinted—and her mother, whom she’s still mourning. Sterling had promised her mother, on her deathbed, to become a lawyer and make a name for herself in the wider world. Instead, she stuck around for a young man named Billy (Dietrich Teschner), then left for a while; when she came back, Billy tried to rape her and she killed him, apparently facing no consequences. Sterling, who used to enjoy dirt-bike racing, finds a wreck of a

1961 Lotus Formula 1 car and, with help from a preening yet sympathetic town grandee (Jeff Wincott) and an embittered mechanic who lost his shop (Danny Hugus), gets it into street-legal shape to enter into stock-car races.

Meanwhile, Sterling reconnects with a cousin named Jackie (Mia Grichendler), who also had big dreams, of modelling; a beloved and lonesome aunt, May (Suzi Haines); the town’s police officer, a woman named Moses (Liv Crosby), who is also a church deacon and Bible-study leader; and her mysterious, ubiquitous Uncle Jeb (Nicholas X. Parsons), who seems to have been preserved from a previous era and functions as the town’s living memory. But her obsession is the low-slung, ballistic-contoured car; she has a vision of how it should look and feel, she imagines in detail taking part in a race while merely strapped in behind the steering wheel, and when she drives it, she’s on top of the world. But as much as she’s pulled back to the town by her past and bound to it by the chance to race, she’s also desperate to make another getaway.

This summary does an injustice to the originality and the sophistication of Tregenza’s way with narrative form. The tale unfolds in many time frames—Sterling’s memory-fraught quest for speed, the troubles of her early adulthood, even echoes of childhood—which intermingle freely on the screen. This technique puts key moments in a permanent present tense of suggestion, implication, and ambiguity. Unlike many intricate stories, there’s nothing puzzle-like about the complex drama of “Fast”: there’s nothing snippy or cut-to-fit about its expansive and extensive scenes. Rather, their time-switching variety and tone-shifting allusions suggest a trip through subjectivity—through Sterling’s inner life and through the collective memory of the town.

That mercurial flow of experience creates a sense of mental pace that’s in sharp counterpoint to the aesthetic style of the movie’s scenes. For the most part, Tregenza—who does his own cinematography—relies on extraordinarily long takes, mainly realized with a roving camera that, rather than dashing about in handheld jolts, is evidently perched on a crane or a dolly, which he controls with a dancer’s refined precision and tactile ecstasy. No scene has more than a half-dozen actors, most have one or two, and Tregenza films their interactions—including long solo walks—in near-constant motion. The movement of the camera is both smooth and bold, emphasizing context along with action and landscape along with the people living in its presence. Above all, it finds wonder in ordinary situations and catches beauty by surprise. Tregenza’s images have the visual equivalent of rhetorical richness: it is as if the movie’s expanses are filled in with the characters’ big and troubled emotions.

Tregenza, lately prolific, seems to have made “Fast” with a newfound, robust sense of uninhibited freedom, as if the energetic realm of its drama has coalesced with his art. In Sterling’s determination to get the Lotus running and to drive it come what may, Tregenza presents the need for speed as a magnificent obsession and the thrill of physical experience as a spiritual quest. The racing scenes—the camera keeping pace on the track with Sterling and her competitors or mounted on a drone following them overhead—are more exciting, more internalized, and more conspicuously beautiful than anything in “F1.” (Tregenza adds an element of self-referentiality to these scenes, by way of visits to a postproduction studio where those images are playing on video screens.) Yet it’s a mark of Tregenza’s art—and of his philosophical insight—that his most astonishing and edge-of-the-seat road scene takes place in town, where Sterling is driving her Lotus within the speed limit as if it were a hatchback. This extended take, at times following the smooth ride through the streets and sometimes running ahead, morphs into a strange yet ominous slow-motion chase, revealing both the neighborhood’s geography and its abiding mentality.

Much as Sterling is, for better or worse, deeply rooted in her town, there’s a hint of menace in