

Review/**Film***Wry Tale of Bored Wife*

By JANET MASLIN

Debbie Bender (Diane Lane) looks perplexed. Something about her marriage to an indifferent radiologist named Gerald (Stephen Collins) and her life in a featureless New Jersey town house isn't quite working out. Debbie isn't the type to dwell on this, but she can't help noticing that life may be passing her by. It is at this point that a miracle appears, in the form of the small, dainty handgun, which Gerald wants Debbie to keep in her night table drawer.

Across the street, in an identical dwelling, lives one of the world's great liars. Skippy (James Le Gros) is also something of a romantic, having become so smitten with Debbie that he can hear her cry out in alarm (when she dreams that the gun fires accidentally) in the middle of the night. Skippy, who will eventually be pronounced "a fishy guy" for doing things like paying for a magazine with a \$100 bill, doesn't say much, and never truly gets around to explaining himself. But he understands Debbie better than she understands herself, and he is ready to become the instrument of her salvation.

My New Gun

Written and directed by Stacy Cochran; director of photography, Ed Lachman; edited by Camilla Toniolo; music by Pat Irwin; production designer, Tony Corbett; produced by Michael Flynn and Lydia Dean Pilcher; released by I.R.S. Media. Running time: 99 minutes. This film has no rating.

Debbie.....	Diane Lane
Skippy.....	James Le Gros
Gerald.....	Stephen Collins
Kimmy.....	Tess Harper
Andrew.....	Bill Raymond
Irwin.....	Bruce Altman
Myra.....	Maddie Corman

These are the elements of "My New Gun," a delectably wry slice of suburban life from a new director, Stacy Cochran, whose sympathy for her subject greatly humanizes an otherwise deadpan style. As imagined by Ms. Cochran and played with perfect bewilderment by the enormously appealing Ms. Lane, Debbie is a lot more than the mad-housewife caricature she might have been. Repeated insults by her husband ("You back in the Valley of the Dolls, Deb?") do not annoy Debbie as much as they could. She seems to have her mind on some-

thing bigger, something that becomes clearer as the film lets her inch toward a getaway.

"My New Gun" has such a keen sense of setting and character that its actual plot seems almost an afterthought. More could have happened here, and should have. But Ms. Cochran succeeds in holding the attention with the general arc of Debbie's transformation, and with a wealth of clever details and deft camera moves. Ed Lachman's cinematography has a bright, mischievous verve, and the mood is compounded by Pat Irwin's jaunty score.

As screenwriter, Ms. Cochran certainly knows her territory; she knows the kind of man who thinks a new Gore-Tex windbreaker is a good topic of conversation, and she knows why that man's wife would be sick of him. Yet "My New Gun" is not a series of potshots at familiar targets. Ms. Cochran also understands that the kind of bland, anonymous setting in which her characters live can be full of wonderful surprises.

It is telling (and tacitly amusing) that the Benders's mock-tasteful household and Skippy's more eccentric place were actually shot in the same setting (for Skippy's domestic scenes, the living room is redone with red linoleum, a Ping-Pong table and conga drums). This points not only to Ms. Cochran's low-budget resourcefulness but also to her knack for making a few well-chosen props say a lot about the people around them.

Sometimes the props don't even need to be visible to be funny, as when an injured Gerald is told that blood was spilled in the Bender family car. "I knew we shouldn't have gotten mocha seats," he wails.

Ms. Cochran fares even better with live actors than with inanimate objects, drawing a hilariously obtuse caricature out of Mr. Collins and a delightfully sly, hangdog manner from Mr. Le Gros. His Skippy has an uncanny way of sounding timid while making outrageous demands. "You don't have another one, do you?" he shyly asks Debbie, after he has stolen her gun for reasons he does not altogether explain. Gerald's irritable assessment of Skippy as a "Satan-worshipping junkie" seems to miss something seriously cunning in Skippy's nature.

Also in "My New Gun" are Tess Harper as Skippy's suitably peculiar mother, a country singer of some renown. ("You know, my brother had a bunch of your records," an admirer tells her. "He was a big fan. He's dead now.") Bruce Altman plays Gerald's best friend, another radiologist, and Maddie Corman is especially funny as his wide-eyed, baby fiancée; it is this couple's romantic plan to buy both gun and engagement ring that convinces Gerald that there is something amorous about a firearm. The film finally points to a sneakier assessment of the gun and its near-magical way of empowering Debbie and setting her free.