



*Hands on a Hardbody*

*Study Guide*

*By:*

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## Synopsis

For 10 hard-luck Texans, a new lease on life is so close they can touch it. Under a scorching sun for days on end, armed with nothing but hope, humor and ambition, they'll fight to keep at least one hand on a brand-new truck in order to win it. In the hilarious, hard-fought contest that is *Hands on a Hardbody* only one winner can drive away with the American Dream. Inspired by the true events of the acclaimed 1997 documentary of the same name by S.R. Bindler, produced by Kevin Morris and Bindler.



## *Documentary*

Bindler was a native Longview Texan before he came back to his hometown to film the documentary, *Hands on a Hardbody*. When producing the film, he enlisted the help of many notable people in the Longview area, even Matthew McConaughey. The whole film process took less than a few weeks, and the competition itself was done in less than a week. The production of the film cost less than the actual truck was worth.



## *From Screen to Stage*

Several groups of musical authors came to Bindler with plans to make Hands on a Hardbody into a musical, but none ever seemed to fit. It wasn't until Doug Wright and Amanda Green came forward with a clear vision of how the show should be conceived before the musical really took off. Wright and Green teamed with Trey Anastasio from Phish to write the music. Bindler was in talks with Wright and Green for a year before Bindler let them have full creative control. The authors had strong Texas roots, with Doug Wright being from Dallas and Trey Anastasio from Fort Worth.



## *Musical*

The musical first had a private stage reading in April 2011 before its premiere at the La Jolla Playhouse in California where it ran from April to June 2012. After its successful run there, it transferred to Broadway at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre where previews started February 23, 2013 and opening night was March 21, 2013. The show ran for 28 previews and 28 performances. Even though having a short-lived run, it received mostly enthusiastic reviews. The production was nominated for 3 Tony Awards and several Drama Desk awards, including Outstanding Musical and Outstanding Music.



## *Hardbody Competition*

When it first originated at Jack Long Nissan as a promotion for the lot, the Hardbody Competition consisted of 24 lucky contestants who competed to win a free truck loaded with the best accessories. This ran for 20 years. The competition ended in 2005, when one of the contestants, 24-year-old Richard Vega lost and walked over to the K-Mart across the street. He simply asked where the hunting goods were and proceeded to take a shotgun and shells off the shelf. Police arrived and asked him to put it down, when he decided to take his own life. Patterson Nissan promptly canceled the event; after the event was investigated by authorities, it was canceled permanently.



## *Characters*

When Wright and Green visited Longview, they interviewed the contestants to try to obtain life rights. They obtained the life rights of 8 of the characters, including: JD, Ronald, Kelli, Benny, Janis, Don, Norma, and Greg. For the rest of the roles, they embellished other characters, and even created two characters out of one (for example: Chris and Greg were taken from Greg's life).

Several of the songs and lines were taken almost directly from the documentary. "Keep Your Hands On It", "Problem Right There", and "Human Drama Kind of Thing" were taken from direct quotes from the contestants.



## *Themes*

Many of the themes that carried over from the documentary include racism, the American Dream, and the idea of Old Generation vs. the New Generation. Racism is explored with interactions with a Hispanic contestant who dreams of a life with equal opportunities. Each contestant has a goal for the truck, believing the truck can fulfill their dreams. With a mix of older and younger contestants, we see the difference of dreams, goals, and experiences. We also see a cultural transition as characters learn each others stories and are able to understand different views.. Some themes are embellished, e.g., how the relationship with God affects the other contestants. Having the “joy of the Lord” can be extremely infectious. We see how God can use the circumstances for His glory.





## *Things To Think About*

Things to think about:

- PTSD is a disorder that most veterans deal with if they have experienced battle, an injury, or been on tour for more than a year.
- The number of illegal immigrants in the US in 2005, was approximately 10-12 million and on the rise.
- The Art of War by Sun Tzu was an ancient Chinese military strategy book dated around 5th century BC.
- Features of the truck: heated mirrors, moonroof, remote keyless entry, mp3 player, CD, radio, 10 speakers, 20 mpg.
- Energy pills can be incredibly dangerous if mishandled.
  - Side Effects: Insomnia, headaches, changes in mood and heart rate.