

Chasing Oscar



By TODD LONGWELL

Leo's been around the world in a publicity blitz

WOOING Oscar is serious business. Just ask Leonardo DiCaprio. While his posse sits idle and his on-again, off-again girlfriend Gisele cools her heels in Brazil, Leo is here, there and everywhere promoting his role as Howard Hughes in "The Aviator" and, by extension, his chances of taking home an Academy Award on Feb. 27.

"He's not somebody we normally see out there," says Michael Burr, editor of the Hollywood Reporter's About Town page. "He's obviously making an effort for this."

In January, Leo embarked on a whirlwind tour of Europe, then winged to Los Angeles for appearances at industry events ranging from the Golden Globes to the 11th Annual BAFTA Tea Party.

In the wake of his nomination, the 30-year-old actor has rubbed elbows with potential Oscar voters at a host of second-tier awards ceremonies (including the Producers Guild, Directors Guild and Screen Actors Guild Awards), made a gaggle of TV appearances ("Oprah," "The Tonight Show," "The Charlie Rose Show") and touched down at the Santa-Barbara International Film Festival to pick up a lifetime achievement award for a career that began 25 years ago with an appearance on "Romper Room."

Leo's schedule is intense, but hardly atypical.

"Oscar campaigns are basically like political campaigns," says a major studio marketing chief.

"A fair amount of it is about mer-



Oscar race

it, a fair amount of it is about popularity and a fair amount of it is about the unseen karmic where-we-are-in-this-moment type of thing."

The man of the moment appears to be Jamie Foxx ("Ray"): He's the favorite of Vegas oddsmakers and Oscar host Chris Rock, who's vowed to steal a statuette from winners in the sound category and give it to Foxx if he fails to win Best Actor.

Fortunately for Leo, the key to getting an Oscar is not winning the approval of Rock, but the hearts of Oscar voters.

One tactic is to have stars and filmmakers bare their artistic souls on TV shows favored by industry insiders (Bravo's "Inside the Actors Studio," AMC's "Sunday Morning Shootout") or at post-screening Q&As sponsored by organizations like the Screen Actors Guild, which hosted one such event featuring DiCaprio in New York on Jan. 27.

To reach older Academy members, studios often plant stories and buy ads in small Beverly Hills weeklies such as 213 and the Beverly Hills Courier.

Studios, actors, filmmakers and media pundits alike often fail to

realize that no amount of schmoozing, subterfuge or "For Your Consideration" ads in Variety is going to convince an Academy member to vote for a movie that doesn't move him.

"If you could simply campaign a movie by spending money, having your people visible and doing the things you need to do, why wouldn't we do it every year?" asks a veteran publicist. "You can't."

LEO'S ITINERARY

Jan. 4	ROME	Film premiere
Jan. 6	PARIS	Film premiere
Jan. 7	BERLIN	Film premiere
Jan. 11	MADRID	Film premiere
Jan. 16	LA	Golden Globes
Jan. 22	LA	Producers Guild
Jan. 27	NYC	SAG Screening
Jan. 29	LA	Directors Guild
Jan. 30	LA	Film Festival
Feb. 5	LA	SAG Awards
Feb. 12	LONDON	BAFTA Awards