# Pillion redefines intimacy and power dynamics in debut film by Harry Lighton



The 2025 British film *Pillion*, marking the directorial debut of Harry Lighton, has emerged as a strikingly original addition to contemporary cinema, blending elements of comedy, romance, and introspective drama within a framework rarely seen on screen. Initially suggesting a quaint, sexy rom-com dynamic through its promotional trailer, the film quickly reveals a much deeper and more complex exploration of identity, power, and emotional dependence. At its core, *Pillion* chronicles the unconventional relationship between Colin, a timid and socially awkward man in his early 30s played by Harry Melling, and Ray, a charismatic and stoic biker portrayed by Alexander Skarsgård.

Set in the seemingly sleepy English locale of Bromley, Colin lives a life defined by loneliness and suburban stasis, working a dead-end job as a car park attendant while nurturing modest social ambitions as part of an a cappella group. His parents, warm and loving figures played by Lesley Sharp and Douglas Hodge, embody both earnest hope and protective concern as they watch their son tentatively step out into the world by pursuing a relationship with Ray. Their encounter—initially presented with a humorous awkwardness, including an infamous scene involving Ray leaving Colin a note leading to a spontaneous and strikingly unconventional first sexual encounter—quickly evolves into a BDSM relationship marked by clear submission and emotional complexity. Colin assumes a subservient role, engaging in domestic chores and adhering to strict boundaries set by Ray, even as the relationship offers him a newfound sense of community and confidence amidst Ray’s biker gang.

The film deftly balances moments of comedy and tenderness with a raw and sometimes unsettling examination of emotional dependence. Harry Lighton’s direction, praised for its subtlety and restraint, captures the intricate power dynamics and the evolving intimacy with a keen eye for detail, using pointed cinematography and a dynamic classical score to embody the tension and emotional undercurrents. The film’s opening motorcycle ride sequence—done entirely in a POV shot—symbolises this vibrant, transformative journey in Colin’s life, challenging typical cinematic portrayals of motorcycles and biker culture.

Central to *Pillion*’s impact is Harry Melling’s nuanced performance as Colin, hailed as a star-making turn that firmly establishes him as one of the most compelling actors of his generation. Melling imbues Colin with a vulnerability and sincerity that make his character’s emotional struggles and growth captivating, portraying a man who must pendulate between self-loss and self-acceptance, submission and autonomy. Alexander Skarsgård adds dimension to Ray, balancing an imposing physical presence with glimpses of empathy, though some critics note his character remains intentionally elusive to maintain Colin’s singular perspective. The chemistry between the two leads oscillates between warmth, tension, and discomfort, enhancing the film’s unpredictable rhythm.

Critically, *Pillion* has been embraced with enthusiasm on the festival circuit, premiering at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival to an eight-minute standing ovation, affirming its resonance with audiences and critics alike. It has achieved a 100% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes, reflecting widespread acclaim for both the script and performances. The film is recognised not only for portraying BDSM and queer relationships with authenticity and nuance but also for its willingness to engage with themes of beauty, privilege, and emotional complexity without resorting to glamorisation or moralising. The dynamics of the relationship question societal assumptions about attractiveness and worthiness within intimate partnerships, spotlighting how attraction and power influence submission and adoration.

Supporting performances—particularly from Colin’s parents—add grounding warmth and humor, painting a believable, empathetic portrait of family navigating complex modern relationships. This contrasts with the stark, often uncomfortable moments shared between Colin and Ray, which drive the film’s intense emotional core.

*Pillion* thus defies simple classification, functioning equally as a coming-of-age story, a comedy of manners, and a candid meditation on unconventional romance and self-discovery. Harry Lighton announces himself as an insightful new voice in filmmaking with a debut that is both technically assured and emotionally potent. The film stands out as a candid, sex-positive, and thought-provoking narrative that challenges viewers to reconsider preconceptions about love, desire, and the journeys we undertake to understand ourselves.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/), [[2]](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pillion), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/pillion-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-b2753658.html), [[6]](https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/pillion-first-reactions-as-alexander-skarsgards-484035/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/), [[4]](https://www.phantasmag.com/articles/pillion-review), [[7]](https://www.ukfilmreview.co.uk/reviews/pillion)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/), [[4]](https://www.phantasmag.com/articles/pillion-review), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/alexander-skarsgard-delves-into-kink-cannes-film-pillion-2025-05-19/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/), [[4]](https://www.phantasmag.com/articles/pillion-review), [[7]](https://www.ukfilmreview.co.uk/reviews/pillion), [[2]](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pillion)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/pillion-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-b2753658.html), [[6]](https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/pillion-first-reactions-as-alexander-skarsgards-484035/), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/alexander-skarsgard-delves-into-kink-cannes-film-pillion-2025-05-19/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/), [[4]](https://www.phantasmag.com/articles/pillion-review), [[7]](https://www.ukfilmreview.co.uk/reviews/pillion)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/), [[4]](https://www.phantasmag.com/articles/pillion-review), [[2]](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pillion), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/pillion-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-b2753658.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://collider.com/pillion-review-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-a24/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pillion> - 'Pillion' is a 2025 British romantic comedy-drama film directed by Harry Lighton, marking his directorial debut. The film stars Harry Melling as Colin, a timid man, and Alexander Skarsgård as Ray, an enigmatic biker. The movie has received critical acclaim, holding a 100% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes based on 31 reviews. Critics have praised the performances of Melling and Skarsgård, as well as Lighton's direction. ([rottentomatoes.com](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pillion?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/pillion-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-b2753658.html> - 'Pillion' premiered at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, where it received a seven-minute standing ovation. The film, starring Alexander Skarsgård and Harry Melling, explores a BDSM relationship between two men. Critics have described it as a 'funny and touching' portrayal of a Bromley biker romance. ([independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/pillion-alexander-skarsgard-harry-melling-b2753658.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.phantasmag.com/articles/pillion-review> - 'Pillion' is a film that delves into a BDSM relationship between Colin, portrayed by Harry Melling, and Ray, played by Alexander Skarsgård. The movie has been praised for its sharp comedy and the performances of its lead actors. Melling's portrayal of Colin is noted for its sweetness and earnestness, while Skarsgård's performance as Ray is described as terrifically imposing. ([phantasmag.com](https://www.phantasmag.com/articles/pillion-review?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/alexander-skarsgard-delves-into-kink-cannes-film-pillion-2025-05-19/> - At the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, director Harry Lighton presented his debut feature film 'Pillion,' aiming to challenge common misconceptions about kink and explore the emotional depth of submissive relationships. The film is based on Adam Mars-Jones' novel 'Box Hill' and centers on the relationship between Colin, a timid traffic officer played by Harry Melling, and Ray, a charismatic biker portrayed by Alexander Skarsgård. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/alexander-skarsgard-delves-into-kink-cannes-film-pillion-2025-05-19/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/pillion-first-reactions-as-alexander-skarsgards-484035/> - 'Pillion' has been met with a glowing reception at Cannes. The film, starring Alexander Skarsgård and Harry Melling, explores a BDSM relationship between a biker and his submissive lover. It won an eight-minute ovation at its premiere, and currently holds a 100% 'Fresh' rating on Rotten Tomatoes, based on 12 reviews. ([attitude.co.uk](https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/pillion-first-reactions-as-alexander-skarsgards-484035/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.ukfilmreview.co.uk/reviews/pillion> - 'Pillion' is a film that explores a BDSM relationship between Colin, a submissive young man, and Ray, a dominant biker. The movie has been praised for its intense and explicit portrayal of the relationship, balanced by its humour and arresting tone. The performances of Harry Melling and Alexander Skarsgård have been highlighted as particularly compelling. ([ukfilmreview.co.uk](https://www.ukfilmreview.co.uk/reviews/pillion?utm_source=openai))