

# TV WEEK

## HUNTER TO MAKE A MOVIE

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**COLOR  
SPECIALS**

**ELVIS  
ON THE  
WARPATH  
—special  
pic preview**

**THE  
TOUGHEST  
TV FAMILY  
IN THE  
WEST**

**MARK SLADE  
of High Chaparral**



Channel Ten program manager John Trost and advertising manager Jim Wilson are off on a dream flight. The two SASIO executives are flying Scandinavian Air Services to Djakarta, Singapore, Tashkent, Copenhagen, Rome, Bangkok, and back to Australia. The flight is an inaugural Trans-Asia express service.

Jim Atkinson still hard at work on his new recording and coaching studio . . . Johnny Mac hoping that the second side on his new record Mr. Sticker Licker will also do well. It's titled Just Step Back . . . Quite a few rumbles in North Adelaide about the recent annual football match between Seven and Nine turning into a farce. Apparently one side had quite a number of "ring-ins" and didn't have one personality on the field . . . Did you listen to the dog food commercial made by Lionel Williams and Eldon Crouch? Lionel made a mistake and mispronounced the word "pedigree" towards the end of the commercial saying "predigree" instead. Eldon gave his tag, "It's Great," and Lionel added, "You Bret It Is." The sponsors liked it that way and that's why you might notice the mistake.

Anne Wills now has a Siamese cat. She picked out a lovely kitten from the cats' home at Magill on her birthday . . . Channel Nine getting ready for special birthday celebrations . . . Guess who was back in the lock-up recently? Ernie Sigley's Boxer Tang . . . Channel Ten's NEW FACES has drawn the best viewer response the station has ever received and nearly 200 entertainers applied to appear on the program in the first week.

DEADLY ERNEST'S two most popular films, THIRTEEN GHOSTS and CARNIVAL OF SOULS, will be replayed as requested by viewers on October 25 and November 1 respectively . . . Jaye Walton, of Ten's A TOUCH OF ELEGANCE, made a special trip to Melbourne with her husband and Ten general manager David Hall and his wife, for the official opening of a new reception centre and restaurant.

The ANDY STEWART SHOW will be replayed by NWS9 on Thursday, October 24, at 8.00. The station has decided to replay the special following a number of requests from viewers . . . Tommy Hanlon jun. will be the special guest at this year's Telethon Ball to be held on October 24. Paul Linkson of 5DN will compere the special telecast by NWS9 at 10.00 that evening . . . The football episodes just seen on BELBIRD in Adelaide were the two costliest episodes yet filmed in the production. The two episodes involved 35 extras and two football teams in addition to the regular cast and the ABC football panel.

Noel O'Connor enjoying a well-earned rest, but we aren't sure where. Noel told TV WEEK he was going on a driving holiday—east . . . Johnny Farnham a busy boy in Adelaide. Apart from A.T. appearances, he also featured in Ten's IN TIME with Noel O'Connor and competed in a special go kart meeting at The Pines . . . Two attractive ladies who have programs on the same station met the other night and didn't recognise each other. #

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● **HIGH CHAPARRAL** cast the Cannon family (from left) Mark Slade (Billy Blue), Leif Erickson (Big John), Linda Cristal (Victoria), Cameron Mitchell (Buck) and Henry Darrow (Manolito).

# THE TOUGHEST FAMILY IN THE WEST

IT'S AN OLD, rugged house, standing gaunt and aloof in the empty desert. And within its walls lives a hard-bitten family that matches fibre for fibre with the immovable strength of the old ranch itself.

We're on a visit to the **High Chaparral** . . . home of Big John Cannon and his brawling, violent family.

A man steps out on the veranda — handsome despite sun-weathering, in his early 50s, dressed in rancher's clothes. His jaw is strong, his eyes are late-pioneer blue and the gun in his hand is worth \$800. Obviously, he's El Patron.

He's also Leif Erickson, who plays the part of Big John in **High Chaparral**. It's about a family who try to conquer the tough, cruel desert country of Arizona in the 1870s. If the series runs long enough, they may even succeed.

The heat is real, since the series is filmed on location near Tucson, Arizona. Leif Erickson, at 6 feet 4 in. and over 14 stone, is real. But the ranch house, built for the series at a cost of approximately \$35,000, is made of glass.

"Same kind of glass (fibre glass) they make boats out of," says William Claxton, producer of the show.

Reason: Fibre glass is much stronger than adobe bricks, lasts longer and is a lot cheaper than building a whole ranch house of real bricks.

Claxton was in on the beginning of the series — before it ever saw realisation on the TV tube. He's a veteran of **Bonanza** and a cohort, compere and co-worker of David Dortort, the executive producer of both **Bonanza** and **High Chaparral**. It was Dortort who thought it all up.

According to Claxton it went this way:

"David had been wanting to do a type of Western very different from **Bonanza** for years. But he never got the chance, he was just too busy. A little over a year ago, he got sick, had to go to the hospital, nothing serious.

"But he finally had time to write down his thoughts. With another writer and a friend of David's, we used it for the two-hour and 15-minute pilot film."

What Dortort wanted, this time around, was a Western that wasn't idealistic.



● **BILLY BLUE (Mark Slade)** . . . "has to grow up a bit."

"I consider **Bonanza** idealistic," Claxton says.

"There's a father figure that solves all the problems, and every episode ends happily. That is not true in **High Chaparral**. True, there is a strong father here, but he does not have the answer to everything."

Realism is the strong point of **High Chaparral**, Claxton feels.

"We met no resistance on it, everybody liked it. NBC-TV bought it just as it was, but they did tell us to keep the budget down a bit."

Average budget for a one-hour, color episode — 26 in a year — is between \$180,000 and \$200,000.

"Casting the series was easy for us," says Claxton. "Both David and I said to each other, at the same time, 'Leif Erickson.' Then all we had to do was find out if he was available."

After Erickson read the script, he wasn't only available, he was enthusiastic.

"A fortune teller once told me that someone with the initials D.D. would come into my life," says Erickson. "I spent 20 years acting and looking for the initials D.D.

There's no doubt it was David Dortort."

Having the lead they wanted, the creators began to fill out the other roles.

"I knew Mark Slade, who plays Cannon's son, Billy Blue, from other television work he had done," says Claxton. Slade had played in **The Wackiest Ship In The Army**.

Manolito, Mexican brother-in-law of John Cannon, is played by Henry Darrow. His name might have an Anglo-Saxon ring, but he is actually of Puerto Rican parentage and has a good old Spanish name of his own — Delgado.

"He came in cold to read for us," says Claxton. "I don't believe in cold readings, just handing someone a script and saying 'read.' But he was so great, we knew he was our man."

"It's beautiful, man," says Darrow. "I had one more year to go on my own five-year limit. My wife has had to help me support the kids and I decided that if I didn't make it — zap — I was going to toss the whole bit and find another way of making my living."

"We did have a hard time finding our girl," says Clax-

## ON LOCATION WITH HIGH CHAPARRAL

ton. "She had to look beautiful in the classical Mexican manner and be able to act. We tested a number of girls.

"But there just aren't that many beautiful girls with the right type of looks, who can act, in Hollywood. We finally pulled Linda Cristal out of retirement — she was perfect for the part."

Miss Cristal had more or less gone into retirement to marry, have two children and get a divorce. She has starred in Mexican, American, French, Italian and South American films. Her father is French, her mother Italian, she was born in Argentina and lived in Mexico for a number of years.

"Believe it or not," says Claxton, "the guy we had the most trouble casting was Buck. We couldn't make up our minds who it was we should get.

"But while we were scouting Arizona for our series location, we came across Cameron Mitchell, who was shooting in a film called **Hombre**.

"Before we had a chance to approach him, a funny thing happened.

"We were on our way to Tucson to take a look at our set being built and sitting in front of us on the plane was Cameron Mitchell. We just handed him a script, we just happened to have."

Mitchell, too, was delighted. He was on his way to Europe for a film commitment there — which he gave up — to star as Buck in **Chaparral**.

Chaparral, incidentally, means a scrub brush cover which the dictionary describes as dense, thorny, impenetrable, thick and thriving in dry, sunny climates.

It may be a symbol of John Cannon, who certainly has all these attributes as he fights off Apaches, poachers and all the problems of an older man with a much younger wife, a sullen son and a drinking mother.

"All the characters will grow and develop as time and the series goes on," says Claxton.

"Obviously John Cannon has to soften up a bit, Billy Blue has to grow up a bit, Buck might even sober up, and Victoria might even have a baby.

"Interesting story line," says Claxton, "but for now, we'll just have her going to church to pray for one." #