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TV WEEK

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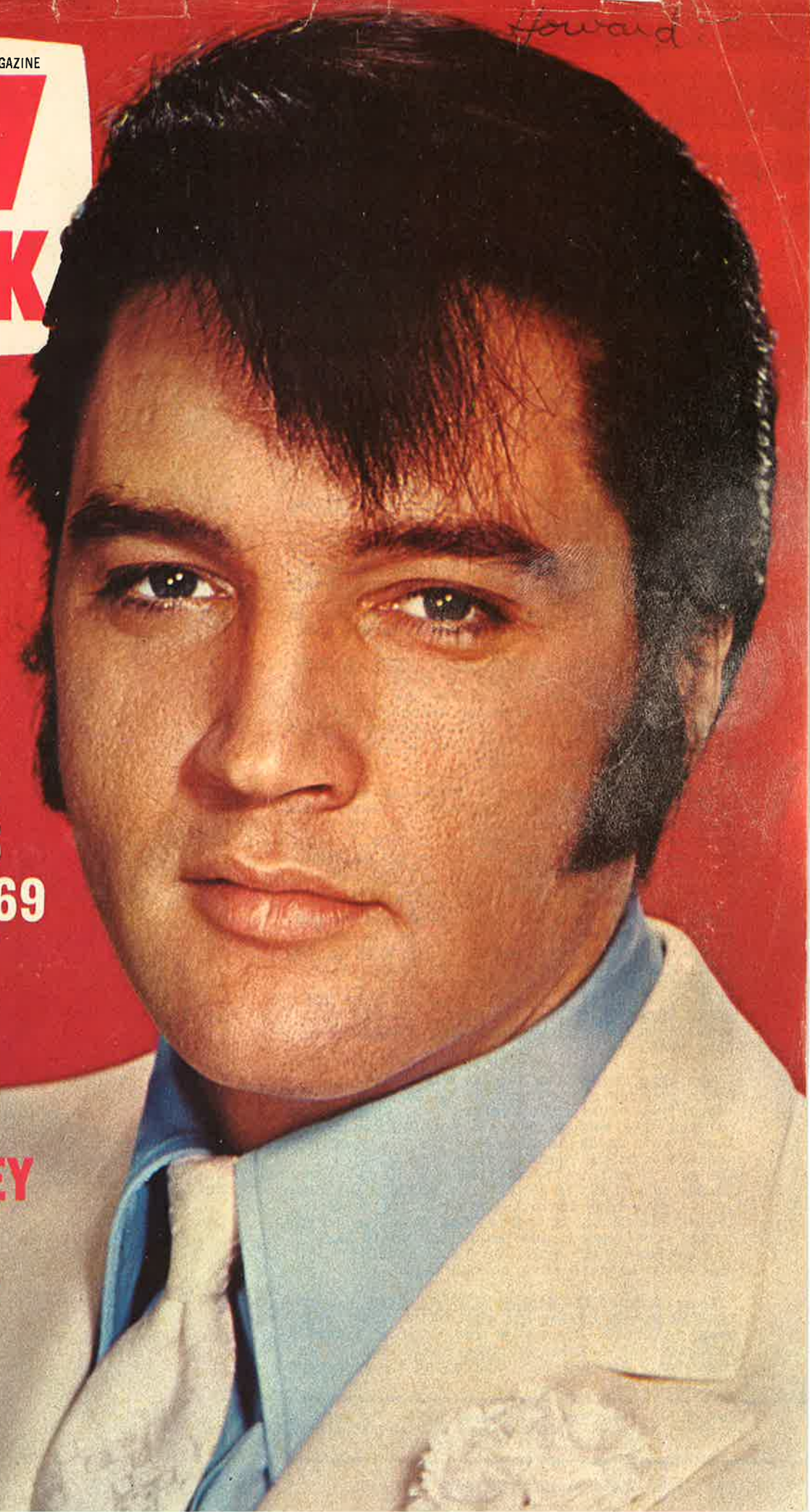
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— A GREAT
GIANT PIN-UP**



COWBOY STAR'S MARRIAGE REVOLT!

BUT NOW BILLY BLUE HAS BEEN TAMED BY A BABY

FROM PETER McDONALD IN HOLLYWOOD

MARK SLADE, the glowering young hero of **High Chaparral**, frankly admits his marriage was a failure — at first.

Mark, the explosive young star who plays Billy Blue Cannon, blames his marital troubles on his own rebellion. "You make many adjustments throughout your life," he told TV WEEK over lunch at a bar-restaurant across from the studio.

"I rebelled against marriage during the first few months of it.

"It was nothing outright. 'I'd come across here after work and sit a little too long and not call home.

"Then the other day I got home and Melinda wasn't there; she was still at work.

"It was so strange. It leaves you with a kind of funny feeling."

Then began the "reforming" of Mark . . . now he and Melinda are devoted.

And when Mark becomes a father in April (the date will be the third, he insisted), he will step into **High Chaparral** patriarch Big John Cannon's boots for the first time in real life.

He admits he's a little apprehensive how they will fit.

"It makes you a little nervous," Mark said, "sustaining a human being, adjusting yourself to that task."

When we asked whether he would like it to be a boy or a girl, Mark exploded.

"It!" he exploded. "What do you mean, it?"

His eyes closed and his head lolled back in blissful contemplation. "It happens to be a him. I've seen him twice already, dark hair, blue eyes, rather handsome.

"One thing bothers me a little, though. In both those dreams of mine he's looked about three years old when he was born."

All his life Mark Slade, a Tom Sawyer as a boy, a James Dean as a teenager and now, as Billy Blue, the symbol of troubled youth, has viewed parenthood from only one side of the fence.

Mark's own transition to adulthood passed through typical stages and, despite his parents' divorce when he was 15, he recalls it as "pretty good."

One of four children, his two sisters are married and his brother plans a career as a physicist. Mark was raised in a small Massachusetts river township.

"I was a Tom Sawyer type of kid," he reminisced. "The club in the chicken coop . . . going up the river to steal corn . . . and getting stung by a bee.

"We had our wild moments, too. We all wanted to be Hells Angels (a motorcycle gang), but I couldn't be one because my mother wouldn't buy me a leather jacket.

"I threw a rotten orange at Elvis Presley in his first movie. I didn't really have anything against Elvis, he's great, but you've got to do something with a rotten orange.

"There was something secure about those days, growing up in a small town everyone took care of everyone else. You became pretty tight and protective of one another.

"It's something I would like for my child. I don't know if it can be accomplished here, but I hope so. There are so many temptations and ways to get into trouble in the big city."

When Mark left home to chase his ambition in New York, Tom Sawyer had become James Dean. It was a short-lived era that ended, after spotting six others like himself, in the realization that he was all but unique.

Despite his nostalgia, Mark's own development won't necessarily be the pattern for his child. Communication, he feels, is vital and he hopes to maintain a youthful outlook.

"But the child has to be treated as another human being, an individual," he said. "I cannot ask or expect my kid to be an extension of myself.

"Most parents force their own emotions and dictates on their children because they don't want them to come back and embarrass them."

Mark's positive ideas on parenthood aren't really surprising. Since he began **High Chaparral** about two years ago he has probably more "family" than any actor in Hollywood.

On the screen he is a member of the Cannon clan—and

the relationship goes beyond the camera. He and Cameron Mitchell enjoy an almost uncle-nephew relationship off-camera and Leif Erickson looks on him as something of a second son.

"One day shooting the pilot we had all been defining our characters," Mark laughed.

"I was twirling my gun and Leif called out: 'Hey, careful where you're pointing that gun. That can be dangerous.'

"I know, you don't have to tell me," I snapped. 'I've handled many of them before. You watch your own gun.' Suddenly we stopped, realising what was happening and burst into laughter."

If it hadn't been for **High Chaparral**, in fact, Mark might not be on the brink of fatherhood.

It was the show that led to his first meeting with wife Melinda, although Mark admits, with something of an embarrassed grin, he helped it along.

"When we finished the pilot episode, we had a big party on the sound stage," he recalled. "Then I came over

here and by the time I left I was feeling just great.

"On the way home I stopped at the Raincheck Room. It's a bar hangout for New York and Hollywood actors. Melinda was there with her room mate and I tried to date the room mate.

"Well, when I left I couldn't find my car and Melinda drove me home. Two weeks later I rang up still trying to date the room mate.

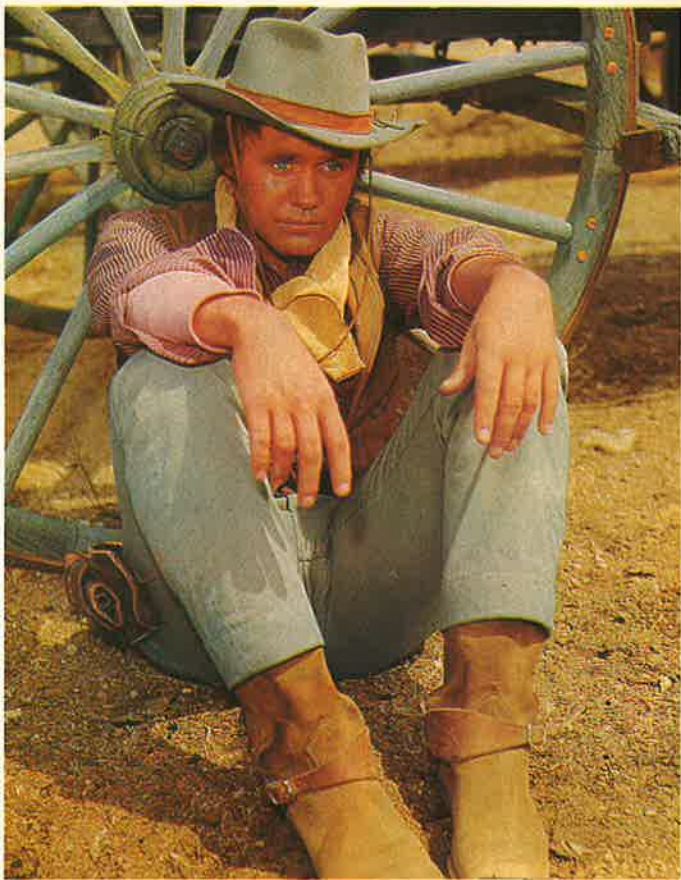
"She said the room mate had left. I couldn't remember what Melinda looked like, but I had a vague idea she wasn't a bad looker, so I asked her out.

"What did she think of me first off? She told me she liked me right away. I don't know why. Boy, I don't.

"On top of being a real goofy guy, I insulted her. I told her she wore too much make-up and that she was too fat. P-h-e-w!"

It wasn't an incident Mark Slade was about to wish hadn't happened. But it was easy to sense his relief that his mother never allowed him that leather jacket. #

● MARK as Billy Blue Cannon . . . a Tom Sawyer who grew up to be a James Dean.



● MARK SLADE and wife Melinda . . . he was interested in her room mate, but married her.