



David Cassidy stars with Wendy Rastatter in 'David Cassidy — Man Undercover.'

## *A Good Idea Runs Into Trouble*

By **BILL HAYDEN**  
Gannett News Service

When "W.E.B." became the first television network — or rather series about a network — in the history of the medium to be canceled, a number of people were very interested in what series would replace it.

After all, Fred Silverman — the new NBC president — had successfully made CBS the network equated with sophisticated entertainment and given ABC the image of the place to turn for lightweight escapist fare. And he's been saying he intends to make NBC synonymous with quality television programs.

The void left by the mercy killing of "W.E.B." has been viewed as the first opportunity for Silverman to make good on his public promises.

His initial move boded well.

Already on order were four one-hour shows based on an episode last season of "Police Story" — undeniably one of television's best crafted anthology series for several seasons. That package — starring David Cassidy as a young undercover cop — was ordered extended into a series.

While the episode the hours are based on, "A Chance to Live," presented in its airing of last May an engrossing picture of the schizophrenia between the private life and the on-assignment role such an operative must adopt, something changed in translating the character into the focal point of an on-going series.

The first sign of trouble came in a rapid succession of title changes for the series. A general industry rule of thumb is that the number of times a show's name is changed indicates just how many problems there are with it. On this basis, a series that gets on with the working title has an excellent chance of success. If the title is changed once, the odds that viewers will like it drop.

This particular series started out as "Undercover." It then became "David Cassidy — Undercover," an indication that the show wasn't strong enough to make it without calling immediate attention to its star. Then, just a couple of weeks ago, it was renamed "David Cassidy — Man Undercover."

The last change — the addition of "Man" — was apparently made so that the audience wouldn't think that the 28-year-old Cassidy was auditioning for the third lead in ABC's "Hardy Boys Mysteries," but rather fronting an adult-oriented drama.

The show spends so much time being a quasi-documentary about hill racing that it gives short shrift to the two elements that would have raised the show above potboiler level — Cassidy's growing alienation from wife Wendy Rastatter as a result of the assignment, and his conflict with special tactics squad head Joe Santos, whose belief in justice by gun results in that squad killing more robbery suspects than it arrests.

Instead of quality drama and adventure, Silverman has given viewers a lightweight, escapist "Hardy Boys" for adults.