

It's sure not Police Story

By GARY DEEB

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If novelist Joseph Wambaugh had any idea his *Police Story* television creation eventually would serve as a springboard for a detective series starring that cute David Cassidy, he'd probably spend a week getting drunk at his favorite Irish pub.

For most of five years *Police Story* was the best cop show telecast.

And about one out of every four *Police Story* episodes was a mini-masterpiece, an emotionally riveting tale that revealed a lot about what it's like to be a cop in a big city. The series demonstrated time and again that psychological violence — not physical violence — is a policeman's most dangerous enemy.

IN ADDITION to being a moderate hit with viewers, *Police Story* got to be a cult favorite among Hollywood actors. Many jockeyed for position to snare character parts on the show.

Meanwhile, quite a few talented screenwriters, who were fed up seeing their work sliced into sausage links by thick-headed producers, found a home at *Police Story*. The same was true of a lot of cops, who discovered they could make a few extra bucks by relating some of their more interesting experiences to the producers and story editors.

All of that ended 20 months ago when Wambaugh left the show to devote his full time to writing more books and developing them into full-length movies.

LAST YEAR *Police Story* disappeared as a regular weekly series, resurfacing sporadically as a 90-minute or two-hour special. Most of the stories were no better than those of any other crime program. The writing was hack and the acting level degenerated miserably.

One of the more inept *Police Stories* in that post-Wambaugh period starred David Cassidy, former heart throb of *The Partridge Family* and half-brother of current teen idol Shaun Cassidy.

David played a young police detective who stalked the city's high schools in a hunt for teenage dope pushers. Naturally, this gave the producers ample opportunity to lay in some pulsating rock and disco music on the soundtrack. It also gave Cassidy a chance to show that he can't even hold a gun properly.

The absurdity of the program didn't matter one iota to NBC executives. The only thing that counted

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was the Nielsen audience rating, which was quite high.

THAT WAS LESS than six months ago. Now, because NBC is in such deep trouble with only a few hit weekly programs, network boss Fred Silverman has plucked Cassidy and his *Police Story* role as the basis for a regular Thursday night series. The unintentionally hi-

larious title: David Cassidy — Man Undercover.

So, at 29, Cassidy is shooting for a rebirth of his career as a TV and record star. In fact, much of the TV series will be a mere publicity vehicle to push Cassidy's new records.

In cooperation with Warner-Curb Records, NBC is letting the series be used as a blatant attempt to revive Cassidy's moribund recording career. Silverman & Co. apparently believe if Cassidy's records start selling again, it can only help the audience appeal of the TV show.