

Adding 'Man' fine touch

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HOLLYWOOD — David Cassidy — Undercover. No, make that David Cassidy — Man Undercover. NBC had second thoughts about that title, lest you might think it should be "Son of Partridge Family Makes Good." Whatever, the new series debuts Nov. 22 on NBC.

Putting the former star of the popular family comedy series into the adult-formulated "Police Story" spinoff was one of those TV strokes of genius that usually spells victory in the ongoing ratings race.

The youthful, slightly built Cassidy looks more like he should be galavanting through the countryside in a Hardy Boys detective caper which, no doubt, prompted NBC into adding "man" to that title. After all, this is supposed to be an adult series about police MEN fighting crime.

Nevertheless, the young son of Shirley Jones, who bears the name of his late father, Jack Cassidy, is on his way, believable or not — Joseph Wambaugh, who created the original, realistic, factual cop series and now is producing major movies, is probably spinning in his executive chair over this turn of events — as a rookie cop who pursues criminals undercover.

Mark Rodgers, co-producer of the series, a veteran on the TV crime-writing beat — former story editor and writer for "The FBI," "Police Story," "Joe Forrester," et al — has to take as positive an approach as one must making a living in the make-believe land that TV mostly thrives on.

"David is a versatile actor," he says. "In the two-hour Police Story he did, you saw some of that. We will focus on the types of crime in which it will be reasonable to use a young undercover officer or several young police officers."

"I mean, we're not going to infiltrate the grand council of the Mafia with a bunch of guys in their 20s. But that doesn't mean we can't do stories of organized crime because they all have aspects where young people are involved. There's a lot of white collar crime where both the victims and the

suppliers are young people like Cassidy."

This latest version of "The Mod Squad," airing at 10 p.m. on a school night, might upset the parents of the 12- to 14-year-olds who would want to stay up to see their idol in adult dress. But Rodgers doesn't think he'll be the recipient of hate mail.

"I think 10 o'clock is okay for the mature themes we will handle. We're not "Police Story" per se, but we're trying for the same kind of feel of authenticity within a series format."

Rodgers says the slim Dan Shay, Cassidy's character name, will not be a super cop who will pick up a tree limb to defend himself against a 6-foot-4 mobster. But he is an agile, athletically inclined lad.

Officer Shay was married and had a pregnant wife in the "Police Story" pilot. For the series they've advanced time a bit so that he now has a two-year-old daughter. Wendy Rastatter takes over the role of his wife from the actress (Dee Wallace) in the pilot.

Simon Oakland, in a familiar role for him, co-stars as Shay's immediate superior, Sgt. Abrams.

David Cassidy — Man Undercover will reflect the changes that have been enforced by concerned groups over TV's excessive violence. Thus, Rodgers says young Shay will care about people he comes in contact with, have sensitivity and "be more emotionally involved."

However, the opening episode runs somewhat counter to this thinking. Shay suspects a hard-nosed lieutenant (guest Joe Santos) is trying to use him to infiltrate a gang of speed-crazy teen-age bank robbers. And it all ends up in a cop shootout.

This being the season of bosoms and butts, or "T and A" as the trades call it, will "Man Undercover" reflect this?

"No," Rodgers laughs. "But we do have some nice-looking young people, good performers and that will be one of the hallmarks of the series. We certainly are not going in for fishing drowning girls out of the water who wear tight T-shirts."