



Title Change Bodes Ill

By BILL HAYDEN

When "W.E.B." — the series about a television network — was 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 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 ongoing 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, the odds drop that viewers will like it.

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," KYW-TV (3), WBAL-TV (11), WGAL-TV (8), tonight at 10.

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.

Based on the premiere episode, the final effort is for naught because it plays like a "Hardy Boys" episode with a little violence thrown in to take advantage of the late time period.

In "Running the Hill," Cassidy is assigned to track down three young supermarket bandits who elude police on hillside chases in their stolen souped-up getaway cars. To do this, Cassidy — look-

ing even younger than younger brother and "Hardy Boys" star Shaun — submerges himself in the Southern California culture that revolves around getting its excitement from running specially modified cars over tortuous stretches of hairpin curves on the region's mountainous roads.

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.

(Full program listings appear on Page 44.)