

David Cassidy stars in new series

By PAUL HENNIGER

David Cassidy — Undercover." No, make that "David Cassidy — Man Undercover." NBC had second thoughts about the title, lest you might think it should be "Son of Partridge Family Makes Good."

Whatever, the new series debuts at 10 p.m. Thursday on NBC.

Putting the former star of a popular family series into the adult-formulated "Police Story" spinoff may or may not be one of those strokes of TV genius that 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 to add "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, as a rookie cop who pursues criminals undercover. (Joseph Wambaugh, who created the original, realistic, factual "Police Story," is probably spinning in his executive chair over this turn of events).

Mark Rodgers, co-producer of the series, a veteran on the TV crime-writing beat (he's a former story editor and writer for "The FBI," "Police Story," "Joe Forester," et al) has to take as positive an approach as one must who is making his living in the make-believe land of TV.

"David is a versatile actor," Rodgers 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 organized crime with a bunch of guys in their 20s. But that doesn't mean we can't do stories of orga-



David Cassidy, Simon Oakland in scene from debut of new show

nized 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 "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 former 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 Dan Shay, Cassidy's character, will not be a super cop who will pick up a tree limb to defend himself against a 6'4" mobster. But he is an agile, athletically inclined lad.

Cadier Shay was married and had a pregnant wife in the "Police Story" pilot on which this series is based. For the series, they've advanced time a bit so that Shay now has a two-year-old

daughter. Wendy Rastatter takes over the role of his wife from Dee Wallace, who appeared 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 the 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 teenage bank robbers. It all ends up in a shootout.

Since this is the season of bums and butts, or "T and A" as the trade calls it, will this be reflected on "Man Undercover"?

"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. □