

Panel show era gets a reprieve

Question: How would your wife or girlfriend complete this sentence — There's nothing wrong with my guy that a good . . . wouldn't fix?

Would she answer — A massage?
A kick-in-the-pants?
Popping the question — and those of similar calibre — is Ugly Dave Gray on the new Channel 7 panel show, *Celebrity Tattletales*.

Answering the questions are such "celebrities" as Gary McDonald, Johnny Pacey, John Meillon and Al Grassby.

Then compare Gray puts the question to their spouses to see who can match their answer with the husband's. What could be simpler?

In one of the understatements of the still-young 1980, Channel 7's program manager Glen Kinging says, "You don't have to be an Einstein to play along with the contestants."

We shouldn't scoff. You don't have to be an Einstein to play along with Blankety-Blanks, *Celebrity Squares* and Family Feud, and look how popular they've been.

Seven is banking on the notion that the era of the celebrity panel show

hasn't passed as it launches *Tattletales* tomorrow evening at 6. Screening Monday to Friday, it carries the station's hopes of strengthening a timetable which proved a headache last year (remember Williesee at Six, Makin' Time and the stop-gap, *Be-witched?*) Opposition shows, Channel 10's news and *The Young Doctors*, have taken it in turns to dominate that slot.

Kinging says: "I would like to think it will do at least as well as the other two. Hopefully in time it will win the slot by a couple of points."

CTT is based on an American show (aren't they all) which producer Reg Grundy first suggested to the Seven network about the middle of last year.

We could quibble with the term "celebrity." Kinging interprets that to mean anyone who is regularly in the public eye.

The show is carefully aimed to appeal to women and children, who make up the bulk of the

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6 pm audience. Some viewers, I guess, will be curious to know about, say, Roger Climpson's wife, or Joanne Lockwood's husband, and children are likely to be amused by some of the risqué answers.

Kinging says: "We don't inhibit the contestants, except to the constraints of family viewing time. We would erase them if they went overboard. The show won't be crude or vulgar."

One of the semi-regulars on CTT is Barbara Rogers, who since the end of *Great Temptation* has helped her husband in their boat business, compared ladies' days in

the clubs and made shopping centre appearances.

It may run counter to her image, but you can expect to hear a few saucy remarks from Barbie. She said, "I think it will surprise people who thought of me as an insignificant little thing who never used to say anything."

"On *Temptation* I had to be seen and not open my mouth much. On *Tattletales* I send up my husband (Terry) and he laughs about everything. He wasn't mad on doing it at first, but now he thinks it's a bore."

Channel 7 will know when the ratings resume in February how many people agree with him.



Gary McDonald and his wife Diana Craig with "Ugly" Dave Gray in *Celebrity Tattletales* (Channel 7).

W.E.B. fails to snare rating audiences

Ironically, the first of last year's new American shows to be judged a dud by real-life TV programmers was W.E.B., a series set in the cut-throat world of TV programming.

It was axed after only six one-hour episodes headed by a two-hour pilot, a fairly typical lifespan for a new series these days as the American TV industry frantically searches for a substitute for violence that still pulls viewers.

Channel 10, which bought WEB before its cancellation, has kept the series on ice until now, a non-rating period.

Judging by the first episode, which screens at 8:30 pm on Monday, that was a wise move.

The story, about a woman producer's fight for survival and recognition in the tough world of TV, is broadly based on the experiences at NBC of WEB's own producer, Lin Bolen.

Bolen now has her own production company, which is just as well, considering how the network

hierarchy is depicted in the series.

The boss, Harry Brooks (John Colicos), unofficially known as "King" by his staff, is a tyrant; the chief programmer, Jack Kiley (Alex Cord), a sadist; Dan Costello (Andrew Prince), head of network sales, a drunk; and Gus Dunlap (Richard Basehart), head of news, a has-been with a drinking problem and a schizophrenic wife.

Let loose among that unattractive lot is Ellen Cunningham, the tough but vulnerable, ambitious but romantic, young producer.

With only 24 hours to come up with something new, Kiley, who's never bothered to view *Our America* at any stage of its production, passes the buck to its petulant producer, David Howell (Zalman King).

If he doesn't come up with the goods, Kiley threatens to call in some boyhood pals, now Las Vegas hoodlums, to "bust his legs in eight places and cut off his ears."

Ellen, who just happens to be Howell's girlfriend, comes to the rescue, suggesting the re-cuts and edits the original series to please the boss.

After telling Kiley not to call her "kid," she gets the job. Kiley goes off to ride his exercise bicycle and the producer, unaware of how much his brainchild is to be butchered, spends the rest of the episode sleeping or having tantrums.

He discovers the truth, of course. It's me or your job, he tells Ellen. She protests she's only doing it for him. "No," he storms, "you're doing it because it makes you feel more like a man."

Ellen, who's been re-making the program aided only by an army of students, is either too stunned or exhausted to reply. Exit Howell.

Will Ellen choose romance or her career? If it's her career, will she succeed in making the series as *Our America* as apple pie?

You'll have to wait until next week for the answers as Channel 10, for reasons best known to themselves, have split what was originally the two-hour pilot, into two episodes.

It's highly unlikely, however, that the suspense will kill anyone.

Running Blind — one to stop and see

Running Blind, a new BBC thriller starting on Channel 2 this week, has two quite spectacular scenic attractions going for it.

One is the countryside of Iceland, replete with tranquil lakes, ice-capped peaks and verdant valleys.

The other is the similarly delightful contours of one of that country's leading actresses.

We see a goodly amount of the first, and even more of the second in episode one on ABC at 8:30 tomorrow night.

In other respects, the thriller is no more than routine, about the same standard as *The Aphrodite* (although, compressed into

three 50-minute episodes, mercifully shorter).

Running Blind is based on the best-selling novel by Desmond Bagley. Judging by the TV treatment, Bagley's book slips along quite nicely on the tried-and-true formula of cloak-and-dagger intrigue, without placing any great demands on the reader's intellect.

The hero, or, as is the vogue these days, the anti-hero, is Alan Stewart, a British secret agent who quit the service in 1974 when he discovered his superiors

duped him into killing one of his colleagues.

Update to Scotland 1978, where Stewart is visited in his hideaway by his former boss, a charmingly evil chap named Slade, who gives him a choice:

Either do a simple errand, or Slade will tell KGB agent Kennikin, Stewart's old adversary, where he is. Not only

that, but Slade will blab about Stewart's girlfriend in Iceland.

Kennikin is understandably eager to find Stewart, who had tried to kill him and in the attempt had rendered the Russian impotent. Who wouldn't bear a grudge about that?

Stewart accepts the job — collecting a small parcel and delivering it to Iceland. Of course the task turns out to be anything but simple, and has more than a touch of danger.

Stuart Wilson, whom you might remember as Count Vronsky in *Anna Karenina*, plays Stewart with much poising, glaring and ill-temper.

George Sewell, a much more honest cop in *Special Branch*, relishes his role as Slade.

So, it's off to Iceland where he's shadowed, pursued and attacked at predictable intervals, still leaving adequate time for falling into the arms of his lady Ellen.

This brings us to that actress, one of Iceland's most striking attractions. Her name is Heida Steindottir. If she ever makes it to Hollywood, I bet her agent changes that name very smartly.

She's the classic Northern beauty, with the finest blonde hair, peaches-and-cream skin and sculptured figure. Yes, but can she act? That's hard to tell. For most of the first episode she's expressionless, except when she's making love with a passion that would melt the snow on those peaks.



Stuart Wilson as British agent Alan Stewart in the three-part BBC thriller *Running Blind* (ABC TV, Monday).



Ellen Cunningham as Pamela Bellwood in W.E.B. (Channel 10, Monday, 8:30 pm).