

By John Galvin

TV 'COPS'



I have just lost the toss for the remote control. That's the trouble with multi-channel television. I want to watch Woody Allen's finest work, 'Annie Hall' on Sky Comedy, while those who have yet to pay the piper and who think that satellite TV is a birth-right want their weekly injection of real-life violence on Sky One. God be with the days when the choice was to either watch Charles Mitchell reading the R.T.E. news or to go and play 'Cowboys and Indians' instead.

I resign myself to an hour-long double feature of the American reality T.V. show 'Cops' as the intro booms.

'Bad boys, bad boys...whatcha gonna do...whatcha gonna do when they come for you.'

The show begins with the frantic commentary from a man who could make finding some unwanted jam in a doughnut into a life-threatening situation for the men and women of American law-enforcement.



'COP'ter

'Officer William Trublowski of the L.A.P.D. has four years experience behind the wheel of a police prowler,' he snarls. 'Little did the young officer know that the night before Christmas Eve as his wife was about to give birth for the first time, he would face the greatest peril of his multi- medal-for-bravery career. You've got to see this to believe it!' he warns two transfixed teenagers and a bored Irish policeman with twenty-four years service, no remote control and a fully read Irish Examiner newspaper.

The scene cuts to Officer Trublowski standing behind the open driver's door of his 'prowler' with an automatic weapon pointed in the general direction of a 'perp' at the wheel of the car he has just stopped. 'Don't you make one goddamn move now,' he shouts. 'Show me those goddamn hands please, sir,' he adds quickly which appears to make his first instruction somewhat contradictory.

The entire scene is lit eerily from above by the shuddering spotlight of a hovering police helicopter, which in time is joined by two more helicopters that were obviously on the way back for a meal-break and have decided to



On your knee's 'perp'

investigate the fuss on the radio. Six other 'prowlers' have now arrived and have encircled the 'perp's' vehicle bringing the total number of police-officers present to twenty if you count the hungry helicopter crews.

A Sergeant arrives at the scene and the eager officer informs him that the 'perp' failed to stop when he put on the siren and lights and that here beside a crashed 'prowler', and surrounded from land and air by a significant number of L.A.P.D. officers is what sane policemen like to refer to as a drunken-driver. The sergeant looks at him for a moment and then turns away, clearly relieved that Trublowski has not called out the National Guard on this particular occasion.

The 'perp' is now on his knees beside the open door of his car, his hands locked behind his head as six officers cautiously approach him with guns drawn.

Having satisfied themselves that he is not likely to spontaneously combust, the officers holster their weapons and rush towards him like the

Munster front row. 'Crouch, touch, pause, engage!' There then follows what appears to be a competition to see who can body-slam him off the ground the hardest while snapping cuffs on wrists and legs. The moaning 'perp' is then carried off-camera to an awaiting prowler.

A breathless Officer William Trublowski re-appears and informs us that the situation is now under control. The 'perp' is a seventy-year-old habitual beer-soaker, has a prosthetic foot and is as drunk as a skunk. The fourteen police-officers on the ground have been extremely lucky on this occasion, as have the six starving air-support officers above.

'A vehicle stop is one of the most dangerous aspects of law-enforcement,' Trublowski reliably informs us as he wipes the sweat from his brow.

It most certainly is William. All the more so if you're a one-footed, seven-stone elderly alcoholic with a fondness for having a few jars before going for a bit of a drive!

Out of the corner of my eye, I see my eldest nudge his younger brother.

'Did you ever do that, Dad?' he grins. I respond as calmly as the situation and the strict laws governing corporal punishment will allow. 'Of course I did,' I lie casually. 'Many times.' 'When?' he persists and allows a short pause before the punch-line. 'How many helicopters were there?' They both laugh out loud.



Evidence? or Hard Labour?

I allow them their moment of hilarity, comforting myself in the knowledge that the early morning surprise of a full day's hard labour in the garden tomorrow awaits two unsuspecting funny guys.

The laughter subsides and I get my chance to rebut. Or so I think. 'How many shots were fired?' quips the youngest fella and the laughter ignites again. My two gardeners roll in opposite directions on the sofa and as they roll back give each other a high five in mid-merriment. I sense the flood-gates of foolishness are about to open. As usual they don't disappoint me.

'Do you remember the day we had to push-start the patrol car for Dad after dinner,' he continues with delight. 'And we had to get Pat Buckley's tractor without the exhaust-pipe to pull it up the road in the end,' confirms his accomplice. 'That would have made a great photograph,' he adds in a soft tone of disappointment at the absence of the media on the day in question. His brother noticing that he needs cheering up lifts the mood again. 'I wonder if the L.A.P.D. has any tractor like Pats for emergencies.' And they're off again. 'Not



Kerry Tow

at all. Those lads wouldn't have any expensive equipment like that.'

The boundaries governing corporal punishment are really being stretched to the limit now and the start on the lawns has just been moved back to sunrise.

I pick up my pen and Examiner and pretend to study the completed crossword in an effort to show them that I'm unshaken, all the while recounting a story in my mind which I feel will put me back in the position of 'Cop Number 1' which I held undisputed until the time they got out of nappies and discovered television.

They look at each other with disappointment at my refusal to take the bait. The eldest wipes a tear from the corner of his eye and gives a judicious cough. 'No. Seriously, Dad. All joking aside. What happened? C'mon. Tell us.'

I tap the pen against my lips to annoy them while pretending to avert my gaze from the crossword to the chess puzzle to which I'm allergic. There is total silence in the room as the pause for the merciful ad-break increases the tension. I can sense their fixed stare on me.

'Well?' they chorus. I move on to the 'Word-wheel' and raise my head as if in deep thought, in reality focusing on a cosmetic advertisement for skin-tone tanning improver which shows a group of scantily clad women and which has caught my eye.

'Dad!' I shake my head as if waking from a trance and glance at them. 'Sorry, lads. I was miles away. What were ye saying?'

The eldest points at the television. 'When did you ever do anything like 'Cops'?' he asks in obvious frustration. 'Like what?' I ask casually. I can sense the congratulatory pat of the 'upper hand' on my shoulder, a hand that will soon clench in a fist of triumph. 'Like your man with the drunk-driver, Dad,' he says slowly and raises his voice as if he's talking to a father who has just been struck down with Alzheimer's.

'Oh! Right. Wait til' I think now. How does it go?' I put on my best and intense American accent. 'The lone officer heads back across the treacherous road of the Connor Hill towards

Dingle in a 'proowler' with 110,000 miles on the clock, one head-light working and wipers that sound like two steel nails being dragged across a blackboard. In the rear seat struggling with double-vision and a twisting road, the 'perp' waves the lighted match over and back in front of the awaiting cigarette like a fan at an Eric Clapton concert when 'Wonderful Tonight' is played. He mutters through the side of his tightened lips. 'Yerra goowan Gargalvin. Geese wan more little chance.'

The 'perp' is a habitual mart-goer with fifteen pints of porter on board and has driven his uninsured banger into town for the last time. The prisoner leans forward between the front seats and breathes heavily causing the officer's eyes to water and making the journey even more perilous. 'Sher yar as sound as a trout,' he says and then falls back in an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

The officer continues on the now hazardous mission, unaware of the impending danger. Suddenly and without warning, the 'perp' cuts loose with an ear-drum-shattering rendition of, 'I wish I had a Kerry Cow.' Miraculously, the officer escapes any serious aural injury. '.....I'd milk her night and morning.' I sing the last line for effect.

There is total silence for a few seconds as their mouths fall open. 'Is that it?' the youngest finally asks. 'That's it!' I proudly confirm. 'No helicopters. No gunfire. Just one policeman doing his job. Same as those fella's there and without half the bullshit.' I throw the newspaper aside, fold my arms and wait for the applause.

The eldest leans slowly forward and rests his elbows on his knees. 'Dad. Promise us that you won't ever tell that story to anyone again,' he says bluntly.

I turn my attention back to the television. Ten police-officers are stuffing a shop-lifter into the back seat of a proowler. God only knows what the lads in the helicopters are up to. How can I compete with that!

The trouble with 'Cops' and programmes like it would appear to be the trouble with most reality television shows. Reality just isn't exciting enough. Just add six 'proowers', a couple of helicopters and throw in a Murray Walker commentary for good measure and you've got a hit on your hands.

What policemen do has always been a source of fascination to the public and understandably so. Unfortunately from a television viewpoint, the majority of American policemen and women complete their service without ever having to draw their weapons. Well now, that's just downright boring!

Enter the producer of 'Cops' with the Jeremy Beadle-like brainwave to invite every police-station in America to send in their most violent and daftest videos and failing that, to at least allow one of their camera-men to go on patrol with the officer who has been voted by his colleagues to be, 'the head-banger most likely to be jailed, sacked or accidentally shot by one of his own before he gets his pension.'

Enter Officer William Trublowski who in one fell swoop has the ability to turn the arrest of a drunken-driver into 'Desert Storm', his Sergeant into a nervous wreck and take my title in the process.

My 'Ground Force' team look at each other and shrug as the credits mercifully signal the end of this particular installment of 'reality' police-work. 'Not that great,' says one. The other nods slowly in agreement. 'There's another double feature on tomorrow night, Dad,' he smiles as they rise and leave the room with the two-headed coin, reminding me of the joke told by Woody Allen at the beginning of the film I have just missed and have seen many times, a joke he tells with such brilliant faltering reluctance.

'Two elderly women are at a Catskills Mountain resort and one says, "Boy, you know the food in this place is really terrible." "I know," says the other. "And such small portions!"