



RIPPING GOOD TIME . . . Pacific Telephone's service representative Jane Matson says paying bills via the mail will be "old hat" when tomorrow's housewife will have access to Touch-Tone — the Bell System's telephone-of-the-future. With it, she will be able to pay her doctor, favorite department store or even obtain facts from a library's computer without leaving her home.

Assignment TV
By **TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY**

Many years ago when the movie makers were less sure of themselves and their audience, Hollywood producers used the "sneak preview" as a means of sounding out public reaction to a feature film. Sometimes they even filmed two endings—one happy and another realistic—to see how much make-believe the fans wanted with their buttered popcorn. After the showing they were asked to record their impressions on post-cards and many a star's future rested on their greasy fingered notations.

The favorite place for these experiments was Glendale, a sleepy Southern California hamlet situated adjacent to an arroyo and distinguished only, to my knowledge, as the birthplace of Debbie Reynolds.

Television producers are far more unsure of their product than the movie makers in Glendale and recently they have developed their own means of sounding out the public heartbeat. One way is to drag passers-by into theaters at random to fritter away a half hour of their time to watch a pilot version of "Peyton Place" and then ask questions like:

"Would you be interested enough to tune in twice a week to see what happens to these characters?"

IN THE PAST several seasons new programs have become "spin-offs" from well-established series such as the projected "Girl from Peyton Place." Other future shows are purposely inserted in the framework of a dramatic series not only to see how it looks on the air but as a means of disposing of the drama if it doesn't.

Such a preview was presented on a recent episode of "The Virginian." Doug McClure of that series was sent across the border into Mexico to buy a bull, although there has been little evidence of a shortage in this particular series. In the endeavor, McClure encounters a trio of excessively masculine egos projected by actors Neville Brand, Peter Brown and William Smith playing Texas Rangers operating out of the border town of Laredo.

Any plot which features Ida Lupino as "Mama Dolores," a Mexican house-keeper with a heart of gold besieged in turn by local bandits, the Yaqui Indians, and the Texas Rangers, can be dismissed as make-believe of the wildest sort.

But the trio of Brand, Brown and Smith will linger on in a weekly series scheduled for next season titled "Streets of Laredo." It is planned for Thursdays at 8:30 p.m., the space currently occupied by "Dr. Kildare." (The young MGM doctor will be split into two weekly half hours next season on Mondays and Tuesdays at 8:30 p.m.)

"THE STREETS OF LAREDO" has been publicized as a "tongue-in-cheek" Western with three "devil-may-care" Rangers. There was little evidence of any mockery of the Western cliché in the pilot that could be called "tongue-in-cheek." That may come later but I doubt it for several reasons. Neville Brand is a grimace actor who is dependent on the sadistic grin for full effect and William Smith is Brand's understudy in the facial department. Peter Brown, the likable kid who played the deputy sheriff on "Lawman" shows every evidence of being a total square both on and off camera.

In their first outing together, they worked well as a trio—but a serious one. There has been only one entirely successful tongue-in-cheek TV Western and that was "Maverick" because it had, in James Garner, a performer who could play comedy.

"The whole fate of a new television series is sealed when the first three or four programs come on the air," TV producer James Moser ("Slattery's People" and "Ben Casey"), told a recent Television Academy meeting. "An hour-long television series is rarely ordered more than three months in advance of actual production. The majority of those that wind up in cancellation trouble do so because there is simply not enough time to prepare them. Preparation is the one thing that gives a series a decent chance to survive."

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