

"Torino Steals the Show On Starsky and Hutch"

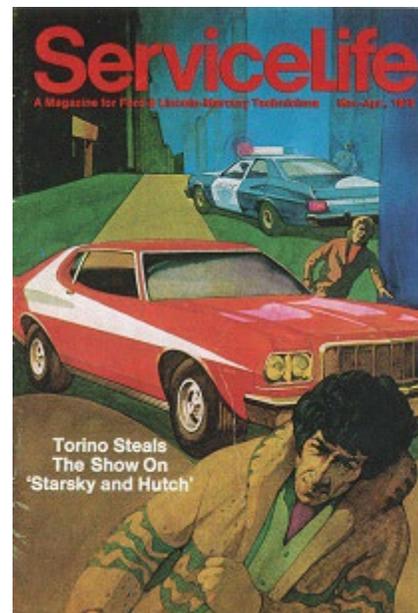
by Bill Carroll

A car hosting its own TV show? A car receiving fan mail? A car winning an Emmy?

Sounds farfetched, but anything possible in the kooky world of TV. And right now, the inanimate star of that kooky world is a red-and-white Torino. If the "mad programmer" of network television ever got desperate for a situation comedy or drama plot, the Torino would be the perfect candidate for its own show.

It's the car that appears in the popular new police series "Starsky and Hutch" (10 to 11 p.m., EST, Wednesday, on ABC). Judging from the letters and phone calls-not to mention the Nielsen Ratings-the car is a star ... and, of course, the show is a big hit.

Not only has the car practically stolen the show, it has captured the imagination of many TV viewers around the country. As one person connected with the program put it: 'Next year, we may have to give the car equal billing in the credits with the male stars.'



*The car's the star on
"Starsky and Hutch,"
popular TV police Series.*

Questions pour in

Almost every day at Spelling-Goldberg Productions, on the 20th Century Fox lot in Beverly Hills, Calif., the mail and switchboard are inundated with the following: "Exactly what kind of a car is that on the 'Starsky and Hutch' show?" "What model is that car?" "What year is that Torino?" Does that Torino have a stick shift or is it automatic?" "Does that car really belong to Starsky and does he take it home at night?" "How can I get my hands on a Torino like that?"

All that comment is like music to the ears of the show's producers because it accentuates the popularity of the series. And the overall success of the program is even more gratifying to the car's producers - because a Torino has stolen a show that is sponsored partly by Chevrolet and Dodge!

"Actually, sponsors buy commercial time from the network," explained Tom Bishop, publicity director for Spelling-Goldberg Productions. "They're really not that much interested in the details of a show - as long as it's successful. 'Starsky and Hutch' (now in reruns) has been in the top 20 in the Nielsen Ratings since it began last fall. The average ranking has been 15th."

Unique detectives

"Starsky and Hutch" is sort of an offbeat cop series. Anyone viewing the show for the first time would take a look at Detectives Dave Starsky and Ken "Hutch" Hutchinson, then ask: "These are cops?"

Despite their casual appearance (they always wear clothes of the street), their strange collection of friends, their special brand of humor in life-and-death situations and their unique interpretation of police procedure, Starsky and Hutch are young, dedicated undercover police officers trying to protect citizens from criminal elements on the roughest, toughest beat in town.

Starsky is the more street-wise of the two. His personality and attitude reveal that he came up the hard way. Hutch is cut from other cloth. He has had more advantages and received a formal education which might have qualified him for another profession. But, like Starsky, Hutch is a policeman because that is what he wants to be.

As a team, Starsky and Hutch sometimes think as one. The areas in which they differ are of no concern, but when things are momentarily dull, they talk about them. These conversations provide many of the lighter moments.



"Starsky and Hutch"-type cars attract more than youngsters - in this case, it's the TV heroes' real-life counterparts checking out a dressed-up Torino at Diers, Inc., Ford dealership in Fremont, Neb.

From 'Fiddler' to Starsky

Starsky is played by Paul Michael Glaser, a still-young veteran of Broadway plays and soap operas. Possessing a Masters Degree in acting and directing, he has been in several movies and made many guest appearances in regular and special TV dramas. He is remembered as Perchik, Tevya's revolutionary son-in-law in "Fiddler on the Roof."

Hutch is played by David Soul, shortened from Solberg, the son of a Lutheran minister. He gave up his college studies to pursue a career in music and made 25 singing performances on "The Merv Griffin Show." A screen test followed and he has acted in numerous movies and TV specials.

Both Glaser and Soul are bachelors, ride motorcycles, play the guitar and keep in top physical condition through such sports as tennis and skiing. They receive just about as many letters and calls from fans as the Torino.

Their "groupies" try to get onto the set (now closed to visitors) and even follow them on location. Each episode of "Starsky and Hutch" (22 a year) requires seven days to shoot, about four days downtown and at the beaches and three days in the studio.

"Ho-hum," says Hutch

In the show, Starsky is portrayed as a car buff, so the Torino belongs to him and he drives it almost all of the time. Hutch could care less about cars (in the show) and wonders why Starsky spends so much time and money on his car. Hutch owns a beat-up 1973 Galaxie sedan, which Starsky sometimes makes the source of his humor.

[A photo caption reads: "Hutch, played by David Soul, often wonders aloud why Starsky, played by Paul Michael Glaser, spends so much time and money on his "Tomato" (Hutch's term for the red Torino)"]

George Grenier, transportation chief for Spelling-Goldberg Productions, said the idea for the Torino's design actually was "a synthesis of many ideas of production executives." He elaborated: "Last summer, Aaron Spelling came to me and said: 'George, we need a specialty car for a new series. Do something to one of our cars to make it stand out.'

"We use cars from Ford Motor Company's Studio-TV Car Loan Program," Grenier continued. "I checked the entire Ford line and spotted a stock Gran Torino that had possibilities. We painted it tomato red, added a wild white stripe - and a star was born.

"Of course, we had to make some modifications to the vehicle for the purpose of stunts performed on the show. The car has mags, oversized tires, air shocks and hijackers on the rear end to cause a severe rake.

"With a 400 CID engine, it can really accelerate, which is necessary for the many chase scenes. Glaser drives the car for the normal-driving scenes. Chuck Picerni, our stunt coordinator, drives it during the chases and for the mild stunts.

The slightest driving error can cause an accident in movie and TV stunt work. In fact, this car is almost wrecked in just about every show.

Camera car aids viewers

"Actually, we now use two identical Torinos. One has a camera mounted on the roof so that viewers can see exactly what Starsky and Hutch see as they drive along. There is no apparatus on the other car. used for exterior shooting."

Besides letters and calls from fans, the Torino has been the subject of many inquiries from "Action Line"-type columns in newspapers around the nation. Their readers want to know all about the car and where they can buy one like it.

Auto shows throughout the country continually request the car for display. Even custom van and truck shows find room to exhibit a replica of the car because promoters know it will attract crowds.

As the show started gaining popularity last fall, some Ford dealers had a few Torinos painted red and white, advertised the fact that a "Starsky and Hutch-type car" would be at the dealership and drew throngs of youngsters.

Because of the interest in the car generated by the program's popularity, Ford Division has ordered a limited production of a similar car - 1,000 units - to be produced at the Chicago Assembly Plant. The car, available for dealer orders, has a very similar paint treatment style.