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In a rather ailing mood Friday night, I sat around at home—which can be a very dangerous thing to do if you're not used to such a traumatic experience. So, grabbing the *TV Guide* and curling up with an appropriate beverage for the occasion, I flicked on the television set.

By some quirk of fate, it just happened to be 7:30 p.m., and by the same quirk, the television dial had been left on an NBC station. So, when the picture cleared I found myself looking at an animated figure of a snake growing heads right and left. Now, I don't know if this is a reflection of my personality or what, but for some reason this captured my fancy.

**OPENING** the *TV Guide* I saw that the program was an *NBC World Premiere Movie* called "Ellery Queen: Don't Look Behind You," a pilot for a possible Ellery Queen series next fall. As you can guess, the show was a mystery-thriller.

The animated snake, it seems, only took the screen after its human counterpart in the show—called Hydra—had committed a murder. Each head thus signified a murder.

Some quick background on the show finds English mystery writer, criminologist, and amateur sleuth Ellery Queen (Peter Lawford) in New York City. There, by hook and by crook, he is convinced he should help his aged American uncle (Harry Morgan), an Inspector for NYPD, find the Hydra, who has strangled five people to date (males with blue cords, females with pink). After Ellery enters the case, the murderer wipes out two more people.

**TO MAKE** a long story short, after much clever deduction and a certain amount of good luck, the Hydra is captured and found to be the mentally mixed-up wife of a gynecologist-turned-psychiatrist. The victims were all ex-babies her husband had delivered.

Sounds exciting doesn't it?—Well, the strange thing is, it was exciting. True, there were some bad parts, but overall the show was well handled.

E.G. Marshal as the gynecologist-turned-psychiatrist and Lawford and Morgan were all good. Minor characters Sergeant Velie (Bill Zuckert) and a TV interviewer (Bob Hastings) also turned in pleasing performances.

**I DON'T MEAN** to sound like a male chauvinist, but it was the female characterizations that were disappointing. Stefanie Powers as the romantic lead for Lawford was really poor. She just can't seem to shake the stigma of *The Girl From U.N.C.L.E.* of a (blessed) many seasons ago.

Coleen Gray, as the Hydra, is not given much exposure in which to develop a character until the end of the show. As a result she seems to be made of cardboard.

**THE REAL** winners in the show are the script writers and the camera men. The script writers wrote one of the best mystery-suspense-detective scripts to appear on television in a long time. However, this may be partly explained because the script was adapted from a 1949 Ellery Queen novel "Cat of Many Tails." The camera men were responsible for some extremely fine location photography of New York City.

Lawford did come off with some "cuteish" dialogue, but if the script writers watch this and keep the intricate, detailed plot and the excellent location photography working for the show, there is every reason to believe Ellery Queen could be an exciting show to watch next fall.



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## Oates-Hollywood's new antihero

by Martin Kasindorf  
 Newsweek Feature Service

In the unromantic, antihero movies of the past decade, character roles have proved to be the surest ticket to stardom. The process has produced Lee Marvin, George Kennedy, Jack Nicholson and now Warren Oates.

Warren Oates? The face is familiar, as well it ought to be after some 14 years under a Stetson on television and movie screens. And the name he was christened with back in Kentucky 42 years ago soon will be familiar, too. His brilliant performance as a wandering motorist in *Two-Lane Blacktop* and his memorable role as Peter Fonda's sidekick in *Hired Hand* have assured that.

"The character man has the conflicts which carry the significant part of the drama," Oates explains, "so the man who plays it well is going to move on." But the moving, until this year, was slow.

"I started playing the fourth heavy back on the horse—the nutty son who was quiet and brooding and would suddenly explode," Oates says of his roles in the *Have Gun, Will Travel* and *Stoney Burke* TV series. "Of course, if you got the chance to explode and had good motivations, you had a shot at being the third heavy.

And if you did that well you got to be the second heavy."

Oates brought to the parts an impassive frontiersman kind of face (a long jaw, horsy teeth, sun-crinkled eyes)—and a Kentucky twang they even marvel at in Louisville. He also brought years of dedication to his craft that earned him a reputation as an actor's actor and, eventually, \$150,000 a year.

They didn't bring him fame, though, or any of the roles he really wanted. "I was always cast as a hillbilly or a rowdy cowboy," Oates says of those years. "Most sophisticated producers and directors are not interested in that idiom. They don't notice anybody in that kind of work. It's beneath 'em."

*Two-Lane Blacktop* has changed all of that and directors are talking about Oates as a new Humphrey Bogart. In the movie, he drives an orange sports car across the country, picking up hitchhikers and creating a new fantasy character for himself to fit his estimate of what each rider wants to hear.

Reviewers have called it the performance of his career, and some have suggested the character of GTO is not unlike Oates himself.

For Oates's happiest hours are spent driving around the Southwest in a camper built on a Chevy truck frame with a 254-horsepower engine. There's beer in an ice chest, a horned cow's skull on the dashboard and Bach playing on cassettes. Vickery, his blonde second wife of a few years, and his children (Jennifer, 10, and Tammy, 7) usually are along.

But GTO, Oates, insists, is an immoral character, while his own strong personal morality is "still influenced by the Southern Baptism of my boyhood."

Oates was born in Depoy, Ky., a coal-field town, and spent his adolescence in Louisville. From high school, he drifted into the Marines and after his discharge entered the University of Louisville. There, he got involved in student drama, playing (what else?) a hillbilly moonshiner.

"Acting," he recalls, "gave me some identity." He left college in 1954, sold his car and went to New York to take acting lessons. To support himself, he got a job as a coat-checker at the "21"

restaurant and eventually he started getting small roles on TV.

When TV production shifted to Hollywood in 1957, Oates headed west. Within three weeks he had a job—the fourth heavy on horseback—and he has been working steadily ever since.

Oates' transition from fourth to first heavy came when his TV work caught the eye of Sam Peckinpah who signed him for his acclaimed *Ride the High Country*, *Major Dundee* and *The Wild Bunch*. These films, in turn, attracted the attention of Hollywood's talented shoestring producer-directors and he kept up a feverish schedule putting the Oates in oates.

"Three years ago," he notes, "I did five films back to back." He got into brawls on location "which started at precisely 9:30 on Saturday night." He had a big house with a swimming pool—and a broken marriage. "It took me about nine months," he says, "to figure out that was nowhere."

Then came *Two-Lane Blacktop* and *Hired Hand* and, best of all, Peter Fonda's recent offer to let him direct a picture to be called *The Land of the Prickly Pear*.

"I'm not satisfied with just acting now," Oates said recently at the tiny (smaller than the swimming pool) pool house in Laurel Canyon he shares with Vickery. "I want to direct. I want to construct films that cover lengths of time, that would make you understand a period of history as you understand a man's life."

Success is still a matter of wonderment. "Vickery and I," he smiles, "we talk about all this, and the thing I keep saying is, 'Woohh!'"

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