

# OPINION

## Law enforcement pays steep price for reality cop shows

MIKE CONTI

Television reality cop shows. The majority of non-police who watch these shows are drawn to the exciting, humorous, dangerous, and rewarding aspects of our profession. They prefer, however, to observe from the safety of their living room couches.

These are the people who the producers are trying to reach - the target audience, who will watch the shows and buy the products that are advertised.

And what a concept it is. Real cops. Real bad guys. No scripts. Anything can and often does happen. Pursuits, domestics, drunks, prostitutes, junkies, drive-by's, you name it. And it's all real, every bit of it.

The car crashes, the shootings, stabbings, the beatings and blood, all wrapped up in tight little segments, carefully edited to eliminate any hint of the overwhelmingly boring aspects of the profession, like the endless hours of paperwork or the uneventful tours of duty.

All action, all the time. And the only ones at risk are society's expendables, the men and women of law en-

forcement.

Now that's entertainment.

If I sound a little angry, it's because I am.

I'm angry because these same people are getting a first hand look at a lot of the tactics and procedures I and my fellow officers employ - perhaps giving them an advantage if, on a particular night, they are stopped while carrying illegal drugs or weapons or both.

Unfortunately, this is not the only damaging result of these broadcasts. Night after night, police officers throughout the country are being exposed to visual input which may register on their subconscious minds and effect the way they perform their jobs.

This might not be a bad thing were it not for the fact that a great deal of this visual input consists of improper tactics and techniques.

It was bad enough when real cops were influenced by TV cops like Starsky and Hutch, the armed Bert and Ernie of my generation.

But here we have real cops, doing things equally unsafe. Things such as an officer writing out a citation as he runs a check to see if a suspect is wanted - while the

unsecured suspect is seated in the front seat next to him. Or two officers responding to a shots fired call who walk directly up to and enter the house, announcing their presence - their firearms securely holstered.

But it's only a movie to the people who produce these shows and to those who watch them.

We are the ones directly affected by these shows, and we are the ones allowing them to be produced.

Whether in the name of public relations, or to educate the public so they'll understand what we face routinely, we've exposed ourselves to our opposition. That segment of society watches us nightly, studies us, absorbs our methods and listens to us explain our thought patterns.

The officers who participate in these programs, besides exposing themselves to possible injury due to being distracted or intimidated by the cameras, also expose both themselves and their departments to possible criminal and civil litigation.

Many of the things we do are often misunderstood, and depending on the camera angle or edited film clip, they may appear to be worse than

they actually are.

Think about it. Low overhead, free actors, big bucks. And it successfully attracts a target audience eager to see some action, maybe watch one of us get hurt, or hurt someone else, strictly for their own amusement and entertainment.

If you're not convinced, rent one of the videos that these same companies have released, such as, *Cops Too Hot for TV! What the TV Censors Would Not Let You See!* There's even a *Cops - The Store* where you can call to

order this tape and others like it - as well as hats, mugs and *Cops*, *The Board Game*.

The way I see it, we are being successfully merchandised, packaged, and sold, brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, we are also paying the bill.

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