

TV Brains Run Out of Gimmicks

HOLLYWOOD.

A CRISIS has hit TV westerns. The producers have run out of gimmicks. You might think this is funny. I think so, myself, but a pall of gloom has settled over Hollywood.

Executives at Revue Productions were forced into an emergency meeting after they saw the first episode of "Laramie," another new horse opera scheduled to saddle up in September.

While viewing this latest saga they realized Slim, the hero played by John Smith, comes off as a colorless schnook.

SLIM'S FATHER is dead, you see. This leaves Slim with the family ranch and his little brother (Bobby Crawford) to oversee (apparently there never was a mother). Also on this spread (just outside Laramie, Wyo.) is an aging foreman in the person of Hoagy Carmichael and a fastgun friend of Slim's who

VIEWING TV

With HAL HUMPHREY

is a hired hand, played by Bob Fuller.

"You get the picture, don't you?" injects Smith's press agent. "Hoagy is one of those colorful old coots who brews his own brand of mountain joy juice and gives it to the horses. Bobby Crawford is a cute kid who collects all kinds of animals. Bob Fuller is a fast gun with a past, and the kid-hero worships him. In other words, everybody in the show has a gimmick except John here."

"That's about it," John agrees. "In this first one I turn out as a captain with a lot of responsibility and nothing else. I told them at Revue that this would have to be fixed, and they agreed."

OF COURSE, I don't know that Smith has too much right to beef. Here's a young, husky Adonis born Robert Van Orden, a direct descendant of Peter Stuyvesant. A few years ago he was grabbed from the ranks of messenger boys at MGM and given a role in a Jimmy Stewart picture, "Carbine Williams."

When he saw acting was going to be his career, what

did young Van Orden do? He up and changed his name to John Smith. (With a monicker like that, how does he figure to compete with Rip, Rock, Tab and Rory?)

Anyway, the brains at Revue Productions sat down to see what could be done about a gimmick for Slim. The calling-card gimmick was out. Paladin has that. They couldn't make him a fast cane without claim-jumping Bat Masterson.

SOMEBODY suggested he pack around a deck of playing cards, and every time Slim was in trouble he could tell his fortune with a fast shuffle. This gimmick was rejected on the ground that it showed a weakness in a man supposed to be fearless.

"How about giving him a religious touch?" asked one of the three-buttoned Ivy Leaguers. "Whenever Slim is in trouble, he turns to God for an answer."

This "gimmick" was debated at length but rejected when a more astute observer reminded the group that religion is a controversial subject, at least so far as TV is

MINNEAPOLIS MORNING TRIBUNE
Mon., July 13, 1959 * 37

concerned.

FINALLY, it was decided to give Slim a past. He became a war hero (Civil war), and as a result he can do just about anything—maybe even draw faster than the hired hand. Which side Slim fought on probably will remain a secret. No use stirring up any controversy at this late date.

In addition to his war past, the producers will plant a good-looking gal on a neighboring ranch. About once every three or four episodes, Slim rides over to make eyes at her, hence eliminating any rumors about his manly prowess in that department.

"I'm practicing with the lariat, too," reports John Smith, "and that should help. I'll also have a chance to do some singing. You know, folk songs around a campfire and that sort of thing."

I didn't have the heart to remind young John that a fellow called Gene Autry had nailed that gimmick down before he was born.