

## Then Came Bronson – a Retrospective

By Kenn Hartmann

Just watched a bootleg copy of 'The Came Bronson' starring Michael Parks as Jim Bronson in a TV drama that aired 26 episodes from 1969 to 1970, the year I 'grajuated' high school; hey, I didn't get much school lernin' watching what my dad called the Idiot box. I asked my father when we could get a colorized Idiot box like my friends. 'You want color? Use your damn imagination. And don't sit so close to the Idiot box, you'll damage your eyes and addle your brain.' How true. Severely. So I was a little surprised that my dad watched the pilot episode. The rumor circulated that the European release featured a full frontal shot of Bonnie Bedelia's boobs in the nude. Folks, this was the sixties and the potential for bedlam over sexual repression was ripe. Even though my dad also called the idiot box a boob tube, the American version offered no such wonders. Of course at 17, a close-up of Bonnie's sweet lips still caused a tittle of excitement in my loins, despite being broadcast in grainy black & white. I began to suspect my dad didn't really give a damn about the motorcycle scenes as much as Bonnie bouncing on the beach and Bonnie bathing in the brook. Of course, the significance of the sickle in the gleam of my mind's eye was to get Bonnie on the back of my bike.

So the series played out typically with Bronson cruising into town, creating a stir then cutting loose down the long, lonesome highway. In fact, the series spawned a musical hit for Michael Parks singing 'Going Down that Long, Lonesome Highway.' The series also featured music from Tom Paxton, Buffy St. Marie and one of my favorites by Hank Thompson 'way down yonder in the Indian nation, riding my pony on the reservation, a cowboy's life is my occupation in those Oklahoma Hills where I was born.' Perhaps as homage to Kerouac and the Beats, Slim Gaillard played a character in one episode. Slim had fame on his own in songs like 'Crap Shooter's Jive, Beatin' the Board, Matzoh Balls and Chittlin' Switch Blues' and became immortalized in Kerouac's jazz and drug induced bob prosody. The series featured a tapestry of characters wove through a trove of circumstance, probably because each episode was written and directed by different artists. Even the titles were great 'Your Love is Like a Demolition Derby in my Heart' and 'Two Percent of Nothing.' In one episode, 'The Spitball Kid' a young Kurt Russell plays a hot prospect pitcher for the pros and the agent is Don Drysdale, the Dodger great, who retired that same year.

Bronson rode a Sporty, mint despite a multitude of spills, crashes and road rage. The bike miraculously morphs into a motocross bike in a few critical scenes and a hill-climber in another. When I went out and bought my first store-bought Harley, it was a red Jim Bronson Sporty (without the all-seeing eye logo on the tank). In the pilot,



Bronson has to rebuild the bike because a yokel steals it for a three second joy ride into the lake. But a few of the close-up rebuild scenes are recycled into a later episode 'The Old Motorcycle Fiasco' when a distracted attendant fills the gas tank with insecticide. All the shows are gloriously populated with period Chryslers, Buicks, Chevys and Fords. Although the Bronson movie came out after 'Easy Rider' it was actually completed prior to the Fonda/Hopper epic release, so any similarity is coincidental.

In the pilot episode, Bronson writes an obituary column for a San Francisco paper. He's called to the Golden Gate Bridge by a potential suicide jumper played by Martin Sheen who goes over the top and kills himself, but not before giving his motorcycle to Bronson. Back at the office, the editor crumples the story and draws a big X and says, 'this is the garbage I'd expect to find in a novel that half the idiots around here are trying to write.' Bronson does his best James Dean and warns the editor to go easy on his pal who just jumped to his death. The editor launches into a tirade, 'this is a business office, not a nursery school.' Bronson keeps his cool but the editor pontificates 'you keep your shoes shined, wear a clean shirt and keep your feet off the desk, in short, look and act like everyone else in the office. I don't give a damn about a motorcycle bum who jumps off a cliff.' Yeah, who wouldn't shove that job and hit the road? Johnny Paycheck's hit song was still years away.

Despite rumors, our editor, Preacher rarely tirades, pontificates or flies into a rage. He once almost flew into something else on an icy road; wait, that's another editor who shall not be named. No one is shackled to the desk with motorcycle chains here at the plush FRP headquarters. Say, that's an interesting ornament on the Christmas tree, is that what I think it is? An uncut European release TCB bootleg featuring bare bosoms? Hey, the only Bonnie I'm thinking about is chopped and in my garage.

-Kenn Hartmann  
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*P.S. For those of you that were wondering about the cover last month of FRP, that bike was built by our very own philisopic writer Kenn H.*

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