



Television

BY KARL DU FRESNE

Go cops

Finally, something that makes arresting viewing.

There's a cheque for \$1.42 pinned to the wall above my desk. It was sent by the producer of *Go Girls* after I wrote a review in which I calculated that this was the amount I, as a taxpayer, had contributed through New Zealand On Air to the making of the series. I stuck the cheque to the wall while I pondered how to declare this windfall on my next tax return, but on reflection I have decided to keep it as a memento of my stint as a stand-in TV critic (which comes to an end, it may please the producer of *Go Girls* to know, with this column).

In a letter accompanying the cheque, the producer said as I felt so ripped off, he wanted to refund my investment. He added he would far rather I watched a blank screen for an hour; I might be able to keep up with it. In fact I hadn't said I felt ripped off. I simply observed that I found the programme too fast-paced and disjointed – but in saying so, I conceded I wasn't exactly the target demographic.

You might conclude from this that the producer was being oversensitive. After all, if the series enjoyed good ratings and popular acclaim from its intended audience, as he maintained, why get so vexed about the view of one curmudgeonly critic? But at least his letter, while peevish, was redeemed by an element of humour.

The same couldn't be said for another letter prompted by the same review, which came from TVNZ's chief spin doctor and positively dripped with malignancy. It's highly unusual for a state-owned organisation to respond so cattily to criticism, and I couldn't help feeling a perverse satisfaction at having provoked TVNZ into proving a point I'd tried to make about its corporate culture.

The response to the *Go Girls* review left me wondering whether our programme makers are too thin-skinned to be in such a highly visible business as television, a medium that invites our judgment 24 hours a day. Or have they



Police Ten 7's Graham Bell spits out words like "moron" with undisguised relish.

become so accustomed to gushing praise that even a slightly negative reaction goes down like a cup of cold sick? There seems little doubt we are now experiencing what might be termed a reverse cultural cringe, in which the chattering classes uncritically applaud anything New Zealand-made. Is it safe, for instance, to confess I'm one of the seven people in the country who don't adore *Outrageous Fortune*? Probably not.

"Pardon me, sir, but I couldn't help noticing, after I removed the sack of cannabis from your boot, that you also have 193 undersized paua."

Never mind. I do like *Police Ten 7*. No need for a reverse cultural cringe here, since crime is one thing we unquestionably do very well. If there were a World Cup of crime, we would have bolted into the final 16.

Retired detective inspector Graham Bell fronts *Police Ten 7* and I admire his style: in particular, his penchant for making statements that end with an emphatic, if invisible, exclamation mark. He clearly delights in being liberated from the constraints of the standard police-issue vocabulary. "Police are looking for a crazed halfwit with an air pistol", he'll say; or (I especially liked this one), "This crustacean fraudster has eight warrants for his arrest!"

Bell spits out words like "moron" with undisguised relish. His signature line, which I have taken to using at appropriate moments, is, "We need to get these

villains off the street!" Damned right! The one disappointing thing about *Police Ten 7* is that our cops are so inordinately good-natured. I've seen enough Australian and American police show to know they don't muck around over there. You can see their baton hands twitching at the thought of a good sanctioned wallop, and that's just when they've pulled over a pensioner with a defective tail light.

But our guys? Their tolerance in the face of provocation is so supernatural that I wonder whether they've ingested mind-numbing substances before going out on patrol. They listen patiently while drug-addled lowlifes rave incoherently, pub brawlers hurl abuse at them and burglars lie like flatfish when questioned about the plasma TV they just happened to be carrying through the streets at 3.00am. They even speak calmly to suspects who have just told them: "Suck my dick."

I've noticed the same exasperating niceness in programmes about our Fisheries inspectors and Customs officers. "Pardon me, sir, but I couldn't help noticing, after I removed the sack of cannabis from your boot, that you also have 193 undersized paua. With respect sir, could it be possible that you miscounted?"

More sceptical souls than I might suspect the government departments that co-operate in the making of these programmes have a right of veto to ensure they are seen in the best possible light, which would explain all the above. But I know no self-respecting producer would sign away editorial control – or would they? ■

POLICE TEN 7, TV2, Thursday, 7.30pm.