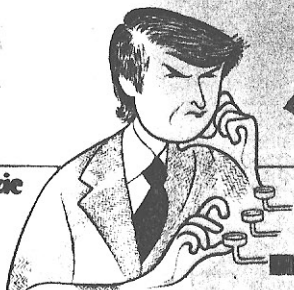


Review

By Robert MacKenzie



MAGNUM, P.I.

(TLC)

Macho is a bad word lately, and the kind of behavior we used to call "he-man" has acquired a faintly malodorous stigma. I guess there's some justice in this; the kind of male who was all muscles, sweat, leather and spit was rather a boring lout, on screen and off, and good riddance to the type. But the thing can go too far. When any sign of overt masculinity is a signal for sniffs and sneers, we're in danger of throwing out the brute with the bath water.

A guy who may help give maleness a good name again is Tom Selleck, the star of *Magnum, P.I.* on CBS. Selleck/Magnum is tall, built, has rascally good looks and a wicked eye. He drives a red Ferrari, slavers after babes in bikinis and generally comports himself in studlike fashion. I am even told, by one qualified to judge, that he has good legs. Since the series is set in Hawaii, he has reason to wear shorts, as the babes have occasion to wear bikinis.

All this is beguiling instead of irritating because the star has a sense of humor and the character has endearing flaws. Magnum falls in love, tears off on false trails, is a sucker for a tale of woe and sometimes blunders. You can't hate a guy who, running from a gang of thugs, forgets where he parked his car.

Magnum is James Bond without the Dom Perignon and raised eyebrow, but the writers have set him up in Bondian luxury. He lives in the guest house of a plush estate and has free use of the owner's Ferrari, in return for odd security jobs. The estate is overseen by Higgins (John Hillerman), a sleek, supercilious dandy who disdains Magnum's loud shirts and loose ways and one-ups him on matters of taste and culture.

The premiere, like most two-hour episodes, was 30 minutes too long. Magnum set out to clear the name of a Navy buddy who had been found dead with 12 plastic packets of cocaine in his stomach. A bit grim, this one, but the character was winning enough to bring us back. Later cases played on Magnum's guilelessness. In one, an Asian beauty hired Magnum to protect an ancient vase, sought by a sinister secret society. A kung fu-type expert went around murdering interested parties and faced off with our hero at the end.

Magnum's gullibility led him into trouble when five little girls urged him to find their teacher, who had run off with a beach bum. Magnum bit, unaware that the girls and their teacher were perpetrating an art swindle. An unscrupulous art collector kidnaped the little girls and locked them in an air-raid shelter; Magnum loped to the rescue. There was some amusing business about switching the paintings under the villain's nose, and funny confrontations between Hillerman and the little girls.

This is a more benign and languid Hawaii than the one in *Hawaii Five-O*, which managed to make paradise look nasty. In short, *Magnum, P.I.* is good getaway, unburdened by any shred of likelihood.

Hillerman is a ham, but plays off against Selleck with good effect. Roger E. Mosley is OK as Magnum's buddy T.C., and the guest actors are competent. A lot depends on Selleck's sex appeal, which seems to be in good order. "He's cute!" said one of my women friends. She also thinks I'm cute, which tends to corroborate her judgment. **END**