

# R. Bourgoing & the bizarre blessing of TV

by Edward Shaw

TELEVISION can be a blessing, I discovered today. Robert Bourgoing is living testimony to its positive contributions. Just a year ago he was a fourth year law student in Montreal, watching an evening TV show like anyone else. This week he is completing a year of the wildest adventures an individual can devise, filming both his quests and fantasies. He is here in Argentina to film the legend of the gaucho.

At 23, he's in the running for an 8,000 dollar prize for putting together the best TV series on world travel for the public television networks of five French-speaking countries — his native Canada, France, Switzerland, Belgium, and Monaco. A tantalizing ad broadcast across French-speaking Canada requested young men who wanted to spend a year travelling overland around the globe filming TV documentaries about their discoveries. Bourgoing had never even owned a Kodak Instamatic, but he was game to get a chance at what looked like the only possibility he'd have in the near future for a world tour. The next day he bought a book on film-making and submitted his name along with 200 other ambitious adventurers.

The contest called for the creation of a short documentary to demonstrate the candidates' ability. Bourgoing rented a video camera, spent two weeks with his manual, and took a bus to Quebec, where the city was celebrating the 400th anniversary of Jacques Cartier's initial journey down the St. Lawrence River. He filmed the magnificent sailing vessels congregated for the festival, and got by the first hurdle, which tripped up 150 of the aspiring contestants.

The next tests were to compose three films, one in western Canada, one in the US, and one together with another of the candidates.

Again, he was chosen, and then subjected to a series of intellectual, psychological, and physical tests. The twenty top choices congregated in Paris, where they underwent training which combined that of James Bond, with that of a paratrooper, plus an existentialist examination of their motivations, aims, and goals in life.

Bourgoing sweated out all of the trials, necessary to be certain that the individuals chosen could survive the stress of voyaging by vehicle about the globe with a partner, and produce film of the quality demanded by European TV.

Seven-two-man teams were selected, and given a small but mighty Citroën, equipped with a winch, indestructible tires, and everything you need to survive on an overland trek from Capetown to Cairo, Bombay to Madras, Continental China, and the Americas from Canada to Austral Chile. A truck carrying spare parts, mechanics, and technical crew to edit and televise the camerawork of the instantaneous TV directors followed along behind the high-spirited duos competing for the prize.

The trip took them up the East Coast of Africa, and came to a sudden stop when Bourgoing and his companion tried to get into Yemen without a visa. Next came India, which for him was the most photogenic of lands. Each country merited a standard two weeks sojourn. In Djibouti this time-span seemed like centuries, and in India like seconds.

China produced the most surprises for the young French-Canadian. He almost froze to death, even with six blankets. The team drove up though the centre of China, the first Westerners to drive their own vehicle through that area. He was shocked by the poverty, even though he expected it, and surprised to meet a rich capitalist who

thrived in spite of the system — his speciality: dealing in 100-day-old eggs for the flourishing gourmet market.

Argentina had been presented to him as drab, with nothing sufficiently bizarre to film. He had hoped to be able to get to the Malvinas, but even with all his ingenuity, could not find a way. What most caught his fancy here was the network of illegal telephone lines woven across the sky in the banking district.

Bourgoing celebrated the finish of what has to be the most fantastic year a struggling law student ever spent. He has not the slightest inkling as to what it signifies in terms of his future. He will return to Montreal with a vision of the globe granted to very few.

Fortunately local television has become aware of Argentina, and we are able to watch fascinating programmes about life in the interior. I now encourage my 9-year-old son to spend as many hours as possible in front of the screen in hopes that a similar opportunity may present itself, but so far ATC has not offered anything as magical to the imagination or as stimulating to the talents of the myriad law students struggling to complete their careers.