

The Adventures of Champion

(aka: "Champion the Wonder Horse")

US TV series : 1955-56 : dir. : CBS : 26 x 25 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[Barry Curtis](#)

Jim Bannon

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Halliwell's Television Companion review:

"A once wild horse befriends a 12-year old boy in the 1880s southlands. Adequate children's adventure, much revived."

The Golden Age of Children's Television comment:

"Instead of merely being supporting acts to cowboys, many horses were promoted to series of their own... **"Champion the Wonder Horse"**'s talents lay.. in rescuing his twelve-year old owner Ricky North (played by Barry Curtis) from all manner of desperate situations, often with the help of Ricky's alsatian Rebel. In real life, Champion was the pride and joy of singing cowboy Gene Autry."

Into the Box of Delights – a History of Children's Television comment:

"In 1955, ITV started broadcasting and this resulted in a completely new situation: competition... By 1956, when Owen Reed took over from Freda Lingstrom he was told by Cecil McGivern that his mission was to regain the audience without dropping standards.

ITV had initiated a policy of westerns and adventure series like **"Roy Rogers"**, **"Hop-along Cassidy"**, **"Rin Tin Tin"**, **"Lassie"** and **"The Adventures of Robin Hood"**, which was the great success. These series were winning hands down in children's terms... At this period ITV was winning 3 to 1 in terms of children.

Owen Reed fought back by increasing the volume of drama and introducing series of quality, like **"Champion the Wonder Horse"**, bought in mainly from the United States. This policy improved the BBC's ratings although it did not solve the problem completely. Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s the pressure of competition was considerable."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Barry Curtis:

"Fair-haired Barry is remembered as Ricky North, the naively good-natured hero of the CBS TV Western series **"The Adventures of Champion"**. (It was better known as "Champion the Wonder Horse"). But he escaped occasionally into cinema films."

[no listing in "History of Television", "How Sweet It Was" or "Television's Greatest Hits"]

Radio Times notes:

"Children's drama.

- "Calhoun Rides Again"

An old friend runs into trouble when he visits Ricky and Sandy North.

- "The Die Hards"

A young doctor and his wife find prejudice hard to fight.

- Rebel and Champion help Ricky and Sandy. "

What's On TV note:

“Children’s adventure series.

- An old friend of Ricky and Sandy asks for their help.

- Nicky’s friend Mary-Jane has a problem when her uncle arrives.
- Ricky and Sandy fight plans for a new railway line which will destroy Champion’s grazing land.”

“..Like a mighty cannonball he seems to fly,
You hear about him everywhere you go,
The time will come when everyone will know the name of..
Champion, the Wonder Horse! "

I can’t have heard that title song in over thirty years, yet still it springs readily to mind, probably due more to the fact it was on the playlist of radio’s Family Favourites at the time than from the series itself. It’s strange though how pungently these old TV themes and advertising jingles persist in the memory.

Boys’ western series may still have been in vogue on British children’s television by the mid sixties – “**My Friend Flicka**”, “**Fury**” – but in all likelihood they were a dying fashion even then, and gradually gave way to girls’ horse series such as “**Follyfoot**”, “**The Adventures of Black Beauty**” and “**White Horses**”, while boys became keener on sci-fi action series or spy romps like “**The Man From U.N.C.L.E**”. If over-exposure on television killed the adult market for cinema Westerns in the seventies, the dwindling of boys’ passion for that genre began rather sooner, I suspect, and for different reasons, but television programmers were slow to recognise the trend, taking too myopic a few of their own ratings reports (when there is only chips and pasta on the menu, it’s pointless claiming that a healthy percentage of the customer base favours either one).

Barry Curtis was about 13, by Holmstrom’s guess. His films were “**THE MARRYING KIND**” (52), “**ONE DESIRE**” (54), “**THE MISSOURI TRAVELER**” (57) and “**3:10 TO YUMA**” (57), none of them exactly calculated to further a boy’s professional ambitions.

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