

ROD RIDES THE COMEBACK TRAIL

**OUR U.S. CORRESPONDENT
BEVERLEY RAE REPORTS ON
THE AUSTRALIAN SUPER STAR'S
NEW TV WESTERN SERIES**

HANDSOME Aussie star Rod Taylor, currently making a TV comeback with a new Western series *The Oregon Trail* has some bad news for the girls.

Once legendary for his hell-raising and for the string of beauties on his arm — Rod said: "I'm slowing down." At 48 he describes himself as "tanned and creased" and says:

"I think its about time I slowed down. I'm getting a little more mature and tired these days. I've cut all my activities in half."

Twice divorced and considered to be one of the film capital's most eligible bachelors, Rod shares his white colonial two-storey house in Beverley Hills with two dogs and a "mad Siamese".

"It is a comfy, cosy, man's sort of house," he says.

"I have a projection room and lots of other little goodies. I built all my own furniture," he said.

No hot and cold running maids? He joked "Only three and a half days a week — remember I cut all my activities in half."

Rod admits his base is in Hollywood now and he has long since exchanged his Australian accent for an American drawl. But he hasn't lost his refreshing Aussie frankness.

He recalls the day he arrived in Hollywood.

"I was treated like dirt. I guess they were expecting a cross between Marlon Brando and Rock Hudson when I got off the plane — and instead they got me with my broken nose and tight pants."

"When I finally made it I never took too much for granted."

Rod says he can't stand the typical Hollywood mentality that starts a conversation by asking "What sign were you born under?" (He's

Capricorn). He also says he likes the kind of women who don't wear their beauty like a brooch: "a person unaware of her beauty attracts me."

"One more thing — I demand honesty. I can't stand intrigue which is why I avoid as much of the Hollywood scene as I can.

"Most of my friends are old friends — like John Wayne and Richard Harris and right on to the gardener. I don't spend too much time with actors."

With filming *The Oregon Trail* starting just last month, Rod is rueful about the fact that just prior to being signed up for the series he bought a big new fishing boat.

"Now I'll be spending the next five months on a horse," he said. "Seriously though, I was frankly overjoyed when CBS said we should have something other than drugs and violence and police shows this season and then said: 'Let's get Rod to do *The Oregon Trail*.'"

"I had made a two hour film as a pilot for the series about a year and a half ago and it's just been sitting around since.

"The time is right for a big budget Western like this one.

"If I see another TV cop telling someone to 'freeze' I'll kick the screen."

Rod agrees with the avalanche of protests from American viewers about the wave of violence and crime shows on TV.

"We just have too much of a bad thing," he said.

"Any violence in *The Oregon Trail* will be completely in context." Rod plays the part of Evan Thorpe, leader of the wagon train. "He's a kind of gentle, ill-educated strong guy, more silent than my usual robust type of character.

"He has lost his young wife and with his two little kids he's trying to pioneer across the country, looking after

both the kids and the people in the wagon train.

"It is a scene of hardship which is very close to history — and it's a lot like the Australian pioneers too.

"Evan Thorpe is a very sympathetic character whom I think the audience will relate to, and with all those people in the American mid-west who couldn't care less about drugs and violence I think it will be a winner.

"Any kind of violence that will be seen is historical — right there in the kids' school books. If you protect your kids from a mad grizzly bear or a pack of Indians, it's absolute history.

"I don't think the protest groups are going to go off their rockers if we're attacked by Indians and have to fight for our lives." On the 2000 mile trek west from Sante Fe to Oregon, Rod will meet up with a series of beautiful co-stars ("Just what I like,") and on-location filming will take viewers through some of the most breathtaking country in the world — over plains, deserts, through canyons and over mountains.

Doesn't it sound like *Wagon Train* all over again?

"Yeah," said Rod. "but *Wagon Train* didn't travel the way we're going to, fighting the mountains, the weather, the wildlife and all."

Rod is naturally anxious that the show hits a lucky rating number.

Although his first TV series *Hong Kong* ran for a year and was syndicated seven times over, a later series *The Bear Cats* was a dismal flop. Another private eye show, *Shamus*, never got off the ground.

This time CBS has confidently scheduled *The Oregon Trail* for prime viewing time — which is 9-10 pm in the US, and slap bang against top rating *Charlie's Angels*.

"It's a big test." Rod cautiously said:

"Maybe that's a rule we all ought to follow in this business. Never get involved in a cheap show. Always go for the big budget jobs."

With more than 50 film and TV credits behind him, the odds are that Rod is all set for another winner.