

# Rod rides again in 'Outlaws'

ENCINO, Calif. (NEA) — It used to be said that episodic television was the graveyard of fading film stars.

At first glance, Australian actor Rod Taylor, who stars in the new CBS fantasy-adventure series "Outlaws" (airing Saturdays), might seem a candidate for TV entombment.

In the distant past, Taylor starred in classic films like "Giant" (1956) and "The Birds" (1963), and he acted with legends like Bette Davis and James Dean — not to mention Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, Jane Fonda and Julie Christie.

Now, at age 57, the man who lost Elizabeth Taylor to Rock Hudson in "Giant" and who lusted after Bette Davis in "The Virgin Queen" is play-



ing in a bizarre series about a sheriff (Taylor) and some outlaws (Patrick Houser, Charles Napier, Richard Roundtree and William Lucking) in the Old West who are zapped by lightning and wake up in Houston in 1986. Christina Belford is the modern-day sheriff who helps the boys start a detective agency.

It doesn't sound like something

from George Stevens or John Ford, two legendary directors with whom Taylor has worked. But don't start digging any graves for Taylor. He still stars in feature films, most recently in "Mask for Murder" with Christopher Lee and a comedy with Britt Ekland called "Marbella."

Taylor's decision to return to the salt mines of weekly television didn't come from a desperation to have his name in front of the public before it forgot about him. He loves the time-travel theme of "Outlaws". After all, he starred in the 1960 cult feature "The Time Machine," based on the H.G. Wells novel.

"'Outlaws' is an absolute romp," he says, knocking back a Mexican beer at a stylish French restaurant. "It's a joy for me to go to work because it's the funniest thing I've ever done."

Much of the humor, Taylor believes, comes from the problem of 19th-century desperadoes coping with 20th-century microwave ovens and the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles.

Science fiction has not fared well on television in the past. Series like "Planet of the Apes" and "Otherworld" disappeared with supernatural speed. Taylor dismisses sci-

fi's dismal TV track record. "A hell of a lot of people look at 'Time Machine' every time it comes on. 'Outlaws' is kind of like me in 'Time Machine,' only funnier."

As a Texas sheriff, Taylor successfully hides his Australian accent. It's a trick he's been pulling off for years. In film after film he's played dyed-in-the-wool Americans, upper-crust Englishmen and even the Irish playwright Sean O'Casey in John Ford's "Young Cassidy."

"I don't know," he says, breaking into a broad Aussie accent. "With the success of 'Crocodile Dundee' I might revert to my old accent."

Taylor remains good-humored and aware that his latest television excursion isn't on a par with his best work with Alfred Hitchcock ("The Birds") or John Ford. "When you watch 'Outlaws' and see a sheriff with nice-looking breasts, you know you're not watching a John Ford movie."