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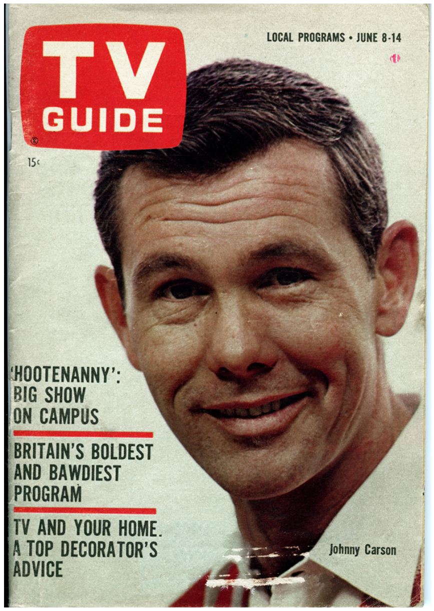
TV GUIDE
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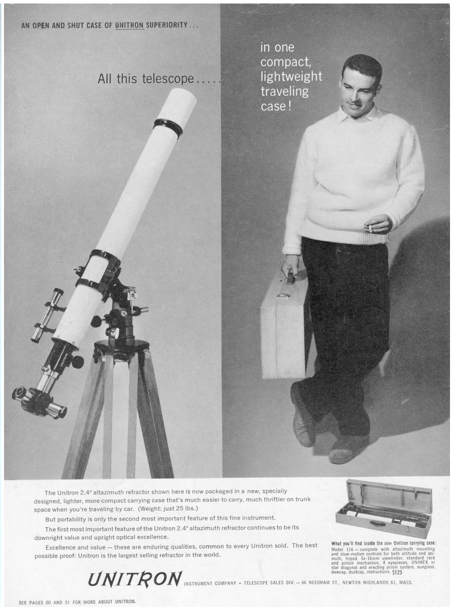
LOCAL PROGRAMS • JUNE 8-14
'HOOTENANNY': BIG SHOW ON CAMPUS
BRITAIN'S BOLDEST AND BAWDIEST PROGRAM
TV AND YOUR HOME. A TOP DECORATOR'S ADVICE
Johnny Carson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SEE PAGES 50 AND 51 FOR MORE ABOUT UNITRON.

Moderate resolution reprint of:

"The Green Lights Are Flashing For Johnny Carson"

Article by Gilbert Millstein, photography by Curt Gunther from Vol. 11, No. 23 - June 8, 1963 - Issue #532 of *TV Guide Magazine*.

Mr. Carson, who popularized amateur astronomy, owned several telescopes. Here he is shown in this interview with his Unitron Model 114 telescope. This scan of an original in Company Seven's archives supports the Unitron 114 telescope displayed in our museum collection.

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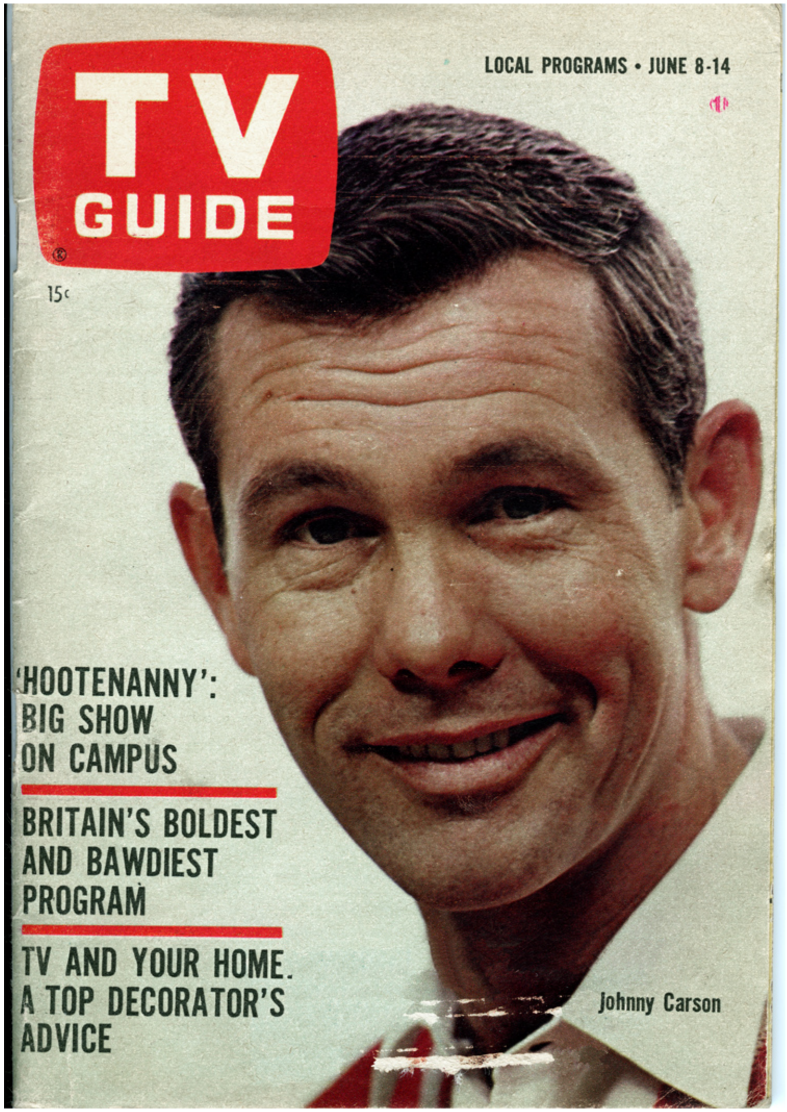

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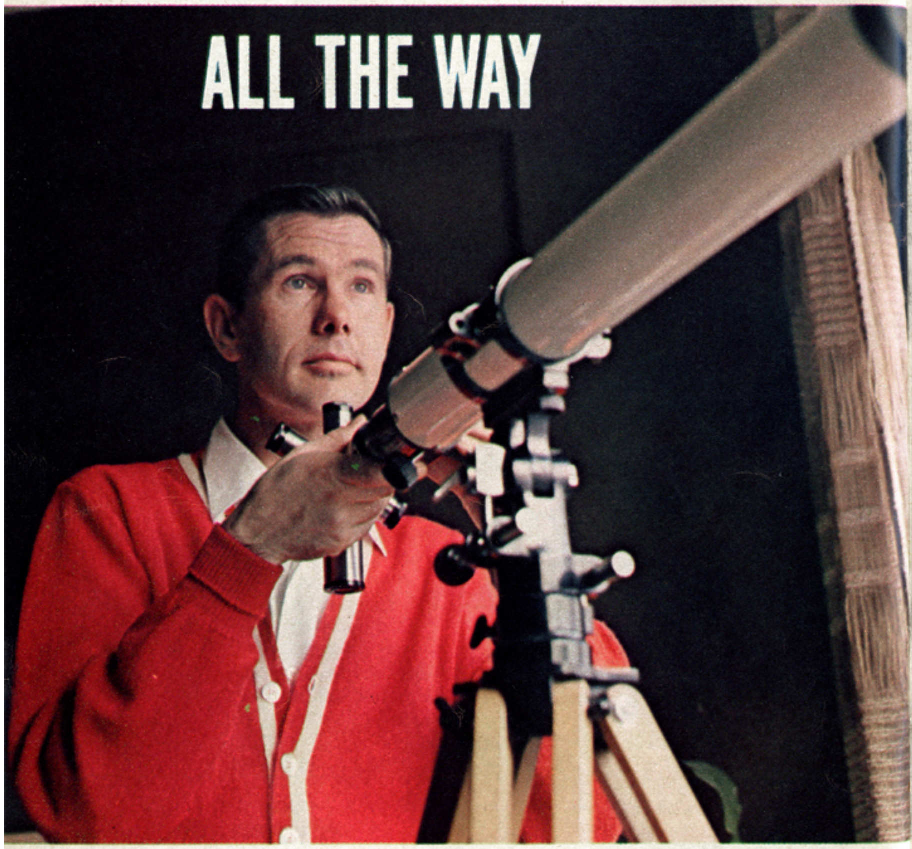
Johnny Carson

THE GREEN LIGHTS ARE FLASHING ALL THE WAY



Johnny Carson,
third engineer to run the crack train
that is 'The Tonight Show,'
has kept it highballing along
right on the rails

BY GILBERT MILLSTEIN

Some weeks after Johnny Carson became the host of *The Tonight Show*—an event handicapped like a horse race, as is the avid, uncomfortable habit of show business (Will he wind Paar? Can he go eight furlongs with Allen?)—an NBC executive said something that made such bookmaking seem either irrelevant or the height of romantic foolishness. His observation revealed as much about the nature of television as it did about the three men. The implication was that the personality of the performer, whether it was Allen's humane sophistication, Paar's fascinating megalomania or Carson's unfailing professional aplomb, was very nearly a secondary consideration. At least of equal importance, he said, was the high degree of technical proficiency of the three.

"It's anything but an odd set of coincidences," he remarked, "that all three choices were *broadcasters,* men born and raised in the radio business who then moved over to television. When we were launching the show all those years ago"—actually, it was eight years, which is a lifetime in television—"we knew it couldn't be done with a comic per se, that it would have to be someone who knew something about the business. When that red light goes on and the cameras start grinding, the man running *The Tonight Show* is going for 105 minutes, practically without a script.

"In effect," he went on, briskly analytical, as though he were discussing the merits of different computers, "he is producing and editing as he goes along. Now, a Carson, like a Paar or an Allen, is at home thinking about the program, his guests and his commercials all at once. He does it automatically. It's like driving a train and it takes a *broadcaster* to do it."

The analogy of the show to a train and of Carson to the engineer is a felicitous one, as even a cursory examination of the way he has handled himself shows. To carry the figure further, there was a cautious opening of the throttle on his opening night last fall, a slow threading through a maze of tracks (only one of which could be the right one).

Thus, to the women in the audience, Carson confessed, with a kind of boyish, toothy charm peculiarly suited to notably regular features, that he now knew "what you ladies must go through in a pregnancy." The only difference, he added, cozily roguish, was that "I didn't get sick."

The pseudo-naughtiness aroused the maternal permissiveness of every woman in the audience. At that juncture Carson delivered the punchline which endeared him at once to the ladies, the gentlemen, the network and the pros, in that order: "I am," he declared, "the only performer ever held up and spanked by General Sarnoff."

Independently, too, he arrived at the same conclusion, although in a more amusing way, that the NBC official had. "I don't come from a show-business background at all," Carson said, "in that I wasn't born in New York on the Lower East Side."

The tenor of the reviews in following performances made it evident that everyone was approvingly aware that Carson had left the terminal at a careful quarter-speed, that daylight could be seen at the distant end of the tunnel and that eventually he would be bucketing headlong over the countryside whistling for crossings (or station breaks) when

continued

required to, and arriving on schedule with the passengers (or nationwide audience) happy and the freight (or sponsors' commercials—by far the most valuable items aboard) delivered intact.

Two weeks and a day later, Carson had let himself out a couple of notches. He punctuated, but thoughtfully did not put an end to, a monolog by Red Buttons, a former burlesque and television comedian who is now principally a movie actor. Buttons was combining a somewhat confused political analysis with a puff for a psychologist of his acquaintance. He was at the height of his epithalamium when Carson interjected gently, "You're kind of a red-headed Dr. Schweitzer tonight, aren't you?"

Out of the corn country

Carson had no intention of stopping Buttons. (Paar might have; Allen probably would have pinched off his raptures before they budded.) He was simply giving both Buttons and the audience notice that he didn't find the proceedings particularly interesting; viewers might, however, and so he was staying his hand. This was not lost on Buttons, who became measurably funnier from then on.

By the time Halloween came around, Carson was under a full, if controlled, head of steam. In a discussion of Halloween customs, for example, he informed watchers that when he was a boy he tipped over outhouses.

(Audiences have not been permitted to overlook the fact that, slick though he looks, their 37-year-old boy was born in Corning, Iowa, which is reassuringly rural for those who cherish agrarian myths. He spent part of his boyhood in Norfolk, Neb., and was graduated from the University of Nebraska, an English major, in 1948, after serving in the Navy.)

Then, in some chitchat about dogs, he noted that attempts had been made to set up comfort stations for dogs. He appeared gratified that they had been unsuccessful and remarked on the irony that in the matter of comfort stations, dogs fared better than humans. Finally, he said that he lived on Manhattan's East Side, where a lot of people walk their dogs, and that he enjoys walking to work. "And that's where," he said, "the Twist started." Everyone enjoyed the deft descent into scatology.

The NBC executive also asserted —his reasoning may have been conveniently after the fact—that in the seven months or so between Paar's departure and Carson's advent (Carson had to finish out his contract with the daytime quiz show *Who Do You Trust?*) we found that controversy is not the key to the show."

This was curious, since Paar, of course, had been overpoweringly, even tearfully, controversial; a not inconsiderable part of his audience tuned in to savor the sheer pleasure of either disliking him, disagreeing with him, or both. Nevertheless, suddenly the network discovered that the "key" was "the same expectancy a reader might find on opening a magazine; he never knows what's going to be in it."

More guests than Paar

"Tonight," it could now be seen—by the NBC man, at any rate—"is really a kind of newspaper, a source of information on the world of entertainment. The eavesdropping technique is what the public's always been interested in."

He said, and the facts bear him out, that Carson delivered more guests per program than Paar had and that whatever it was Paar had been doing so well, Carson was running "not just a TV show, but a big business, and his knowledge of the business stands him in good stead every night."

Carson is acutely conscious that in reality he is simply the newest engineer of an established crack train; he has no intention of suppressing the essential Carson, nor, on the other hand, does he intend to risk running it off the rails by riding no-hands. The other day he discussed, in some detail, the kind of disciplines he has had to apply to himself. Two of the hallmarks of the show are its quality of spontaneity and its topicality. "I actually started to work on it about six weeks before it went on the air," he said, "and then I found out I couldn't. It got awfully cold, looking at it two weeks later, and if there is one thing *Tonight* has to be, it's live.

"I didn't want to make the mistake of coming out opening night with a monolog that sounded like I'd worked on it for six weeks. We tried not to overbook talent, not to have too many departments. I wanted to kind of lie back and see what would happen, and, above all, to be myself. There's always a temptation on a show like this to try to make a big initial impression. There were all those comparisons to be made with what's gone before, and the critics waiting to see what the new major-domo was going to do. We threw out a lot that first night. I could have done a lot of things just to say, 'Look how versatile I am.' I said to myself, 'Forget all that; be yourself; play off the situations as they happen and try to relax.' "

Toward that end he resolutely abstains from long preshow conversations with guests; he sees as little as possible of his three writers; he clips the latest editions of the newspapers to be as *au courant* as he can be; and he makes an earnest effort not to use bits and pieces that he has done over the years and that he knows play well under almost all circumstances. He knows quite well that the longer he remains on the air, the more he will be able to get away with. "Once they get to know you better," he said, "once they like you, it's amazing what you can get away with."

As to the reason he took on the show, Carson said that for him it represented "the last area in television that is what the medium was originally supposed to be—live, immediate entertainment." As to where it might lead him, he was unable to speculate. "There's always been a sequence of events for me in which everything seemed to fall into place," he said. "One show kicked me into another; the last one kicked me into this."

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