A peculiar variant of reality-based television programming, America's Funniest Home Videos (AFHV), first aired as a Thanksgiving special in 1989, and later debuted on 14 January 1990 as a regular series on ABC. The show still maintains respectable ratings in its sixth season and is due for syndication in 1995 by MTM Television Distribution. The program's simple premise—to solicit and exhibit a series of humorous video clips shot by amateurs who compete for cash prizes—has had a surprisingly enduring run in its half-hour slot at 7:00 P.M. in the Sunday night schedule.

Rooted generally in the sub-genre of its comical, voyeuristic predecessors, such as Candid Camera, TV's Bloopers and Practical Jokes, and Life's Most Embarrassing Moments, AFHV more particularly owes its genesis to a weekly variety show produced by the Tokyo
Vin Di Bona, Steve Paskay

PRODUCERS

Bob Saget, Tom Bergeron

HOST

reifies the slapstick conventions which the producers seek and that keep home viewers tuning in.

and reward their favorite video clip, maintaining the illusion of home video's folksy character, while the ten thousand dollar first prize

excludes the banal everyday activities most typical of home video; and, finally, the format's allowance for a studio audience to vote for

production's typical naiveté and non-commercial motivation with formal contrivance and financial incentives; the stress on comedy which

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most private and embarrassing moments. Several hypotheses for the series' popularity have been cited: the urge of the viewing public to get on television in order to secure their fifteen

minutes of fame; the possibility of winning a $10,000 cash prize; the all expenses paid weekend trip to Hollywood to attend studio

tapings; the charisma of host Bob Saget, the first performer since Arthur Godfrey to star in two concurrent, high-rated series (the other

being Full House); the universal identification with everyday life fundamental to home movies and home video; and the sheer fun of producing television about and for oneself. The series' producers, however, cite the program's humor as the key to its success. Taking the "Bullwinkle approach" that provokes different kinds of laughter from both children and their parents, AFHV not only seeks to attract a wide demographic, but self-consciously mocks itself as insignificant, harmless fun.

Despite its overt lack of pretension, AFHV remains significant on several accounts, especially its international origins and appeal.

Banking upon the perceived cross-cultural universality of home video productions, Di Bona had conceived of the series as international from its inception. AFHV can be seen in at least 70 countries and in more than a dozen languages (it is rumored to be the favorite show of the Sultan of Brunei). Di Bona has subsequently sold the format rights to producers in other nations, at least 16 of which have created their own versions, while others merely replace Saget with indigenous hosts. Most international affiliates also have clip trade agreements; AFHV itself liberally blends domestic and imported clips (blurring the title's emphasis on "America" and pointing to television's partnership in global capitalism).

Also significant is the series' premise that the typical consumers of television may become its producers--that the modes of television reception and production are more dialogic than unidirectional. This inversion, as well as the format's unique hybridization of genres, results in peculiar effects worthy of investigation: the professional's commissioning of the amateur for commercial exploitation; the home video's simultaneous status as folk art and mass media; the promise of reward through competition that re-inflects the home mode of production's typical naiveté and non-commercial motivation with formal contrivance and financial incentives; the stress on comedy which excludes the banal everyday activities most typical of home video; and, finally, the format's allowance for a studio audience to vote for and reward their favorite video clip, maintaining the illusion of home video's folksy character, while the ten thousand dollar first prize reifies the slapstick conventions which the producers seek and that keep home viewers tuning in.

-James Moran

HOST

Bob Saget, Tom Bergeron

PRODUCERS

Vin Di Bona, Steve Paskay
PROGRAMMING HISTORY

ABC
January 1990 -- Sunday 8:00-8:30

FURTHER READING

"Bob Saget, the Host with the Most on His Busy, Busy Mind." People Weekly (New York), 26 March 1990.


Lessons learned from the mistakes made in America's Funniest Videos. next. About the event. Complimentary attendance for Television Academy members and their families (non-transferable). Membership card and ID are necessary for admittance. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis with reservation; Admission is not guaranteed. Parking is $4 per car. This event will be presented as a Live Webcast here at TelevisionAcademy.com. If you have a question for the panel please submit it to activities@televisionacademy.com. When Television Academy Leonard H. Goldenson Theatre NoHo Arts District 5220 Lankershim Blvd. North Hollywood, CA 91601 Google Maps. Special Thanks to Our Sponsors. Member Profiles. The Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Foundation, in association with Ernst & Young LLP and the Grable Foundation, is offering four scholarships in honor of Fred Rogers, the creator and long-time host of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. The scholarships are intended to support and encourage aspiring undergraduate or graduate students to pursue careers in children’s media and further the values and principles of Fred Rogers’ work. Get details and applications visit emmysfoundation.org/fred-rogers-memorial-scholarship. The Pages of Destiny. The 4th Annual Lights, Cameras, Excellence Presents – THIS IS AMERICA. Be Part of the IMMERSIVE REVOLUTION. Digital Media Club – Framestore Presentation & Houdini Workshop.