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Straight man for America's pratfalls

'America's Funniest Home Videos' 500th Episode

By TODD LONGWELL

Before Tom Bergeron taped his first episode of "America's Funniest Home Videos" back in 2001, exec producer Vin Di Bona asked him if there was anything he'd like to see in the studio.

"I said, 'Three things: my nipples and my breath,'" recalls Bergeron, who also hosts ABC's "Dancing With the Stars." "I like the studio meat-locker fresh. It keeps the audience alert."

Other things took a bit longer to figure out.

"It's a show on at 7 o'clock, so it veers a little punnier than I am in my actual life, so the writers and I had to work on a sort of comedic detente," Bergeron says. "They would send me a script and I would say, 'Tweak it,' and ("AFV" co-executive producer) Todd (Thicke) would say, 'Here's where Tom kills your babies.' So it took a while. Now, I hardly do any tweaking at all."

If the studio audience fails to respond, "there's not a lot I can do," Bergeron admits, "because the burden for that is on the videos."

Asked to name his personal all-time favorite clips, Bergeron says it's a tie between a shot of a dog growling viciously at its own twitching hind leg, thinking that it's try to steal his bone, and a video of a skydiving grandma who loses her dentures in mid-air. He also tends to favor wedding clips.

"That's a day where typically so much anxiety, planning and angst has gone into it," Bergeron says. "Life has a way of just messing with you, and that's of course what the show is based on, and it never seems to be quite as true as at a wedding."

One thing he's seen enough is his head superimposed on other people's bodies.

"They did it once last season, and I'm sure they're going to try to talk me into doing it another time this season," he says, "but they've backed off considerably, for which I'm appreciative."



Tom Bergeron and Miss America 2009 Kristen Dalton with the Golden Cup for the 1 millionth groin hit on the show.



'AFV' host Tom Bergeron taping a Christmas show at Disneyland.



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Bergeron admits he's also burned out on "AFV's favorite visual punch line, the groin hit.

"It's a bit of heresy, but it doesn't make me laugh as much as it used to," he says, noting that the 500th episode will feature the presentation of a Golden Cup for the 1 millionth groin hit. "I need to see clever variations of that for it to really break me up, whereas animal videos and things with little kids continue to make me laugh."

He also enjoys the audience participation games that have been worked into the show in recent years, such as "Head, Gut or Groin" and "Who's Making That Racket?"

"That's fun for me, because that tends to be a time when I'm ad-libbing more with the people, as opposed to just playing off the script," Bergeron says.

At the end day, Bergeron says his job is simply to play Dean Martin to the fall-down Jerry Lewis-style slapstick of the videos.

"If I get a laugh every so often, that's great," he says "But my main function is to be the straight man to the clips."

'America's Funniest Home Videos' 500th Episode

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