

Gunsmoke TV Series Description

The Gunsmoke TV show was a western [action](#) series that emphasized a rare commodity in the wild west ... law and order! Marshall Matt Dillon was responsible for bringing respect for the law to Dodge City. Cattle thieves, gunfighters and other bad guys had to seek out another place to get into trouble!

Gunsmoke Cast Members:

James Arness Marshall Matt Dillon
Dennis Weaver Chester Goode
Amanda Blake Kitty Russell
Milburn Stone Doctor Galen "Doc" Adams
Burt Reynolds Quint Asper
Ken Curtis Festus Haggen
Roger Ewing Thad Greenwood
Robert Brubaker Jim Buck / Floyd (2 Parts Which Ran Separately)
Buck Taylor Newly O'Brien
Glenn Strange Sam
Clem Fuller Clem
Dabbs Greer Wilbur Jonas
James Nusser Louie Pheeters
Howard Culver Howie Uzzell
Budd Buster Moss Grimmick

Gunsmoke Broadcast History:

First 6 Seasons: Saturday Nights from 10:00 to 10:30 PM
Seasons 7-11: Saturday Nights from 10:00 to 11:00 PM
Seasons 12-16: Monday Nights from 7:30 to 8:30PM
Final 4 Seasons: Monday Nights from 8:00 to 9:00 PM

Gunsmoke Trivia:

The wonderful theme song for the TV show was also titled "Gunsmoke" (also sometimes "Old Trail") and was written by Glenn Spencer and Rex Koury.

John Wayne was offered the part of Matt Dillon but decided that movies were where he wanted to stay. He actually recommended James Arness to play Matt Dillon. (See Opening Narrative below).

Before the TV show, there was a [Gunsmoke radio show](#) than aired from April 26, 1952 through June 18, 1961, co-existing with the Gunsmoke TV show for six seasons! The cast included William Conrad as Marshall Matt Dillon, Parley Baer as Chester, Howard McNear (Floyd the Barber on [The Andy Griffith Show](#)) as Doc, and Georgia Ellis as Kitty. The radio show's opening narrative was different than that of the TV show (See Below). It was narrated by Roy Rowan, George Walsh, and George Fenneman (Groucho Marx's sidekick on ["You Bet Your Life"](#)) at different times during its run and went like this: "Around Dodge City and the territory out west there's just one way to handle all the killers and the spoilers, and that's with a US Marshal and the power of ... Gunsmoke!" William Conrad also had a narrative on each radio episode as follows: "I'm that man ... Matt Dillon, US Marshal. The first man they look for and the last they want to meet. It's a chancy job, but it makes a man watchful ... and a little lonely."

While there had been other westerns before such as ["The Lone Ranger"](#) and ["Annie Oakley"](#), Gunsmoke was the first one oriented towards Adult audiences. Within a few years there were more than 30 such shows on the air at one time! Some favorites were ["Bronco"](#), ["Have Gun Will Travel"](#), ["Maverick"](#), ["Rawhide"](#), ["The Rifleman"](#), ["Wagon Train"](#), and ["Wanted Dead or Alive"](#).

James Arness is the brother of Peter Graves (Jim Phelps on Mission Impossible).

First Lady, "Lady Bird Johnson", was such a huge fan of the program that, when she learned that James Arness was a Republican, she felt personally betrayed!

Gunsmoke was actually scheduled for cancellation in 1967 due to low rating. CBS President William Paley and his wife were big fans of the TV show, however, so he decided to try moving it from Saturday to Monday. It worked! The TV show got back into the top 10 rankings and stayed on the air 8 more years!

It is often stated that Gunsmoke's 20 years on the air makes it the longest running American television series but that's not strictly true. It is the longest running "typical" TV show in prime-time not counting reruns. Other shows have

been on the air longer but not in prime-time or they were news, variety, sports or talk shows. At this time (2003), "Meet the Press (1947)" is actually the longest running TV show on television with 55 continuous seasons! Second is the "Tonight Show" - 49 seasons. Others are "60 Minutes" - 35, "Walt Disney" (Under Various Titles) - 34, "Monday Night Football" - 33, "[Saturday Night Live](#)" - 28, "[The Ed Sullivan Show](#) / [Toast of the Town](#)" - 28, "20/20" - 24 and "Late Show With David Letterman" - 22.

At 6 feet 7 inches tall, James Arness was the tallest TV actor to play in a lead role. He weighed 235 pounds and had a 48 inch chest. Due to his large size, he was one of the first soldiers to storm the beaches at Anzio, Italy in world war II. Like many of those brave men, he was wounded.

If Arness didn't always look huge onscreen, maybe it was because his co-star Dennis Weaver (Chester) was also tall at 6 feet 2 inches! He is a vegetarian and environmentalist. His home was built almost exclusively from recycled building materials. In the 1948 Olympic trials, he won the 1500 meter run and got 6th place in the Decathlon! In 1958, he Amanda Blake (Kitty), and Milburn Stone (Doc) began singing together. In 1960 at the New Mexico State Fair, their performance broke the attendance record at the Albuquerque Arena! He refused to wear a leg brace as a prop on Gunsmoke as he feared being seriously injured while riding a horse. His trademark "limp" seemed to do just fine on its own!

Ken Curtis (Festus) started as a singer for Tommy Dorsey's orchestra! That led to several roles in "singing cowboy" movies which were popular in the late 1940s. He appeared in many of Director John Ford's movies after that (he married Ford's daughter) before landing his role on this program.