

Wagon Train Encyclopedia Article

Wagon Train

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One of television's most illustrious westerns, *Wagon Train* wedded the cowboy genre to the anthology show format. Premiering in 1957, when the western first conquered prime time, *Wagon Train* told a different story each week about travelers making the long journey from St. Joseph, Missouri, to California during the post-Civil War era. Such guest stars as Ernest Borgnine and Shelley Winters interacted with series regulars: the wagonmaster (first played by Ward Bond, then after his death, by John McIntire); the frontier scout (first Robert Horton, then Scott Miller and Robert Fuller); and the lead wagon driver (Frank McGrath). Inspired by John Ford's *The Wagonmaster*, the hour-long series (expanded to 90 minutes during the 1963-64 season) was shot on location in the San Fernando Valley and produced by MCA, giving the episodes a cinematic sheen. For three years *Wagon Train* placed a close second to *Bonanza* before becoming the most popular series in the nation during the 1961-62 season. The show left the air in 1965 after 284 episodes.

Further Reading:

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West, Richard. *Television Westerns: Major and Minor Series, 1946-1978*. Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland, 1994.