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TV Guide's reality show tricks: lots of booze, little food, fights for screen time



It's common knowledge that "reality" TV shows don't really show reality. Even the competition shows are filtered through the eyes of producers aiming for the highest ratings.

TV Guide reveals some of the tricks and secrets that make the top "reality" shows successful.

"To make a successful reality show, all you've gotta do is throw together a colorful cast of characters and keep the cameras rolling, right? Not quite. Juicy story lines, impromptu catfights and edge-of-your-seat drama don't just happen. That's why the powers that be have a bottomless bag of tricks at their disposal." [TV Guide, print edition, December 6, 2010]

For instance, incidents that only get a few minutes air time actually take hours to shoot. On *The Biggest Loser*, the contestants are on the scale for a lot longer than is shown, and the weigh-in actually takes up to three hours to film.

The Bachelor and *The Bachelorette* are even more brutal.

"We'd start filming at 8 or 9 o'clock at night and wouldn't be done until 7 o'clock in the morning. It's brutal," says a suitor from Jillian Harris' season. Adds Erica Rose, the tiara-wearing contestant from *The Bachelor*'s Rome season, "We'd be on our feet for like 10 or 11 hours. We'd be drinking. They really didn't even have food for us. I was about to collapse." [TV Guide]

Money isn't the reward for most reality shows — fame is. Mindy Hall, the runner-up on Bret Michaels' *Rock of Love Bus*, says women began fighting on Day 1 in order to get more screen time.

"It's not even 10 seconds into filming, you don't even know each other's names, and this person wants to pull the other one's hair out. I'm like, you can't know this person long enough to hate them that badly!" says Mindy. "I guess they think it will make them more interesting."

...Hall points to one of her dates on *Rock of Love Bus*, which wasn't quite the fantasy it was made out to be on the air. While she and Michaels flew via private jet to their destination, on the way back, when Mindy was solo, "I flew commercial and airport security took half my makeup, lotions, toothpaste," she says. "I had to go through the rest of the show without them." [TV Guide]

On *Dancing with the Stars*, the audience isn't allowed to wear jeans or t-shirts because producers want a nightclub atmosphere. In addition, the eliminated pros are eager to come back on results

night because when the stars are eliminated, the pro partner's salaries end. The pros come back and are paid union scale for the dance numbers.

On *Top Chef*, the contestants aren't sweating due to the intensity of competition. Air-conditioning and fans interfere with sound quality during filming, so they're not used. *Top Chef* host Padma Lakshmi wears an earpiece and a producer feeds her instructions, like "make sure each diner comments on every chef's dish." If a line is messed up, they'll reshoot it until it comes out right.

Contestants on many shows are cut off from the outside world. They aren't allowed cell phones or Internet and can't contact friends or family during filming. "When there is no outside world, you're obsessing over what's going on out there," says Erica Rose.

American Idol is consistently tops in the ratings, but the wannabe Idols aren't allowed to pick any song they want to sing.

"We'd be given a list of, say, 12 songs, and there's X amount of people, and a lot of the time I didn't get the song that I really wanted," says Season 7's Carly Smithson. (When multiple singers wanted the same number, names were drawn from a bucket.)

...Smithson says that during Season 7's Andrew Lloyd Webber week, the Broadway legend persuaded her to change her tune, literally, from her first-choice song, *The Phantom of the Opera*'s "All I Ask of You," to his preference, "Jesus Christ Superstar." "I wasn't 100 percent sure this was what I wanted to do, but it happened so fast," she recalls. "I went with what Andrew Lloyd Webber was saying, and I ended up getting eliminated." [*TV Guide*, print edition, December 6, 2010]

Simon van Kempen of *The Real Housewives of New York City* sums up the reality of reality TV: "You don't do reality TV to make money — you do it because you're a narcissist."