Golden world of the cartoon kings

Yogi & Co branch out with a new TV network

CASTING AROUND: Hanna and Barbera’s stars are spreading their talents across the globe

When Harry Met Sally and the Tom Cruise/Jodie Nicholsen Demi Moore success, A Few Good Men. In this billion-dollar world of more than 700 TV channels desperate for viewer-attractive programmes, Turner needs to make the films which will feed his international cable networks and supply the satellites in the sky with options for the future. But that’s not just his own economics — mogul Rupert Murdoch is chasing him in the sky like a fourth network. He also owns America’s Fox Television and with it has created a “fourth network”. He also owns 50 per cent of Britain’s BSkyB as well as becoming a hi-tech TV presence in the Far East.

It’s high noon in the cable TV business. And interestingly, the product — quality and quantity — is proving as important as the new technology.

Which crazily makes the cartoon network a serious aspect of Turner’s international operations. The channel will open in Europe with about a third of the programming dubbed into French and Scandinavian languages.

Hanna, very much a Hollywood man of the golden days, ponders his place in 1993 television history. He can only shrug and admit on Gulf Street and movies such as how we trimmed. Instead of 26,000 MGM cartoons — had been $45,000 for five minutes. Suddenly it was $2,700 for five minutes. It was a shock but it made us learn how to trim and cut — and how we trimmed. Instead of 500 million, he put up $667 million in cash and stocks for two highly successful independent Hollywood film production companies responsible for The Nightingale, On Golden Pond, and many of the studio’s biggest hits.

He’s the technical wizard and his ideas man Barbera has, he estimates, produced thousands of hours of cartoon television as well as 250 series and specials which have been dubbed into 20 languages. They are the biggest cartoon company in the world.

By all those who argue that we live in a Mickey Mouse world, it is the perfect combination. You can watch Yogi Bear, Huckleberry Finn and Fred Flintstone of the 14 hours a day and then, just when you’ve yabbadabbadooed, move on to 18 hours of the likes of Bogart and Bacall.

Clever? Very. For the bottom line, as always, is the dollar — billions of them. Turner, who sees himself as a philosopher and player in world events as much as a media entrepreneur, is involved in a high-stakes game.

He owns that great classic, Gone With The Wind, as well as the MGM film library for which he paid $1.4 billion in 1986. This month, he put up $500 million in cash and stocks for two highly successful independent Hollywood film production companies responsible for The Nutty Professor and some of the studio’s biggest hits.

How to ‘Toon’ in

How can fans of Fred Flintstone and the other characters pick up the Cartoon Network and TNT, the other new channel launched by American media tycoon Ted Turner? Cable subscribers and owners of a satellite dish will be able to receive both services free from September 17. But viewers who want to watch the six new satellite channels launched this Wednesday must be subscribers to a BSkyB channel.

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