

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**A**SK actor Kiefer Sutherland when he knew the decision to commit to a TV series was the right one and he answers immediately.

"When I walked on the set of '24' and saw the first three or four shots [director Stephen Hopkins] had set up," says Sutherland.

The key for him was the incredible sense of movement those complicated shots implied, shots that have made "24"—which debuts Tuesday, Nov. 6 at 9 p.m. on Ch. 5 — one of the most anticipated shows of the fall.

"It wasn't that I thought that it was going to be really good per se, because it was way too early to be so arrogant," says Sutherland, who's calling from the set.

"But I went, 'OK, cool. He's trying. He's going to make something interesting here. Now you do something interesting with him. Here's a chance to keep telling people that you're good at what you do.'"

The 34-year-old actor is making the most of that opportunity, enjoying the surge of attention that surrounds "24."

It's a smart, action-packed drama that depicts one relentlessly gripping day in the life of Jack Bauer. He's an FBI agent who must deal with the kidnapping of his daughter, terrorist threats against a Senator running for President and — apparently — very little sleep.

From his bursting-at-the-seams film resume, it's easy to assume Sutherland wasn't getting much sleep to begin with. Like his father, Donald, Kiefer has starred in films that are good, bad and indifferent. Highlights include "A Few Good Men," "Stand By Me," "Promised Land," "The Lost Boys" and Roger Dert's pick for the best film of '98, "Dark City."

But TV is an entirely different affair. Commit to a movie and your job is over in four months at the most. Commit to a TV show and — if it takes off — every thing changes for years to come.

"That's the funny thing about television. You go to make something and the ramifications are huge. It could potentially become the next seven years of your life. I'm not used to making choices on that kind of a time frame," Sutherland laughs. "Certainly not at least for work. You don't enter into it lightly."

Acting is another thing entirely, since Sutherland did plunge into a career without a care in the world. Born in London, he was raised mostly in Canada by his mother, the actress Shirley Douglas, after his parents divorced.

Like most kids, he couldn't imagine spending years of his life in high school when he already knew what he wanted to do. Unlike most kids, Sutherland actually did quit school, never to return.

"It was very romantic at 15, 16, and 17," says Sutherland ruefully. "Then all of a sudden you're stuck at a dinner and you can embarrass yourself really quickly with a limited education. I very quickly phoned the University of Toronto for their bachelor degree in English book-lists."

Neither parent was thrilled with what he wanted to do.

"My mother and father both had a lot to say about it. They also at the same time were really fantastic parents. I think the deal was they gave me a trial period for a year. And I was just so fortunate with this acclaimed debut film 'The Bay Boy' that things started to happen and they let it continue."

"But I guarantee you if it had not worked out in the time frame they had allotted, they would have yanked me back so fast it would have made my head spin."

That initial burst of attention didn't last. But television stepped in early on to give Sutherland a boost. After struggling in Los Angeles and even briefly sleeping

# Man on the run

in his car to save money, he snagged a major role in an episode of Steven Spielberg's anthology series "Amazing Stories."

"That was the first job I got in the United States," says Sutherland. "I was actually visiting my father in England when I found out." Sutherland is an old pro at interviews, though there were years he was gun shy after inadvertently becoming tabloid fodder when his marriage to Julia Roberts was canceled at the last moment.

Since married and divorced to another woman, with a daughter who lives near him in L.A., Sutherland is unfailingly polite and eloquent when talking about his passions like ranching and the rodeo. He even took two years off to tackle team-roping calves on the circuit, something you'd be hard pressed to know from his steady stream of film roles.

Sutherland admires the production values of other shows like "Ally McBeal," and "NYPD Blue." In fact, in some ways the level of financial commitment to "24" is probably greater than any feature film he's ever worked on.

"This is a 24 hour film to us," he says. "Every time we think, 'Oh my God, you guys must be running out of stuff to put us through,' they don't."



Kiefer Sutherland plays Jack Bauer, an FBI agent who must deal with the kidnapping of his daughter, terrorist threats against a senator running for president — and very little sleep in the new Fox drama "24" (cast inset)



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