

● REALLY BIG SHOW

'Ed' dead?

Or just a little lovesick?



Where did their love go? Ed loves Carol, but Carol loves Dennis — and Ed's bitterness has taken the charm out of this former fan favorite.

By MICHAEL GILTZ

HOW quickly we turn on a show. First "The Sopranos," then "The West Wing" and now, perhaps, it's curtains for "Ed."

This week Carol finally says "I do" to the raffishly charming Dennis, but the honeymoon may already be over for die-hard fans.

This critics' darling is enjoying its third season in a cushy, no-pressure timeslot on the classiest night NBC (or any network) has on tap.

"The West Wing" is (or should that be was?) a critical and popular smash, while the venerable "Law & Order" enjoyed similar prestige and even better ratings.

And "Ed" II pulled up the rear with enough to stake a quiet claim to quality television.

The series began with Ed wooing Carol — cutting right to the chase when most

shows would tease out the possibilities of a fit Sam and Diane for years. So perhaps the only surprise is that "Ed" maintained its charm for so long while teasing out every permutation of frustrated love.

Carol is ready to commit? It walks Kelly Ripa to va-va-voom all over Ed. Ed is getting up the nerve to stammer out an "I love you?" An acerbic, funny alcoholic of a principal named Dennis gets under Carol's skin (And how.)

But this season, the show seems out of kilter, uncertain whether to put the nail in the coffin of the Ed-Carol storyline or bring it back zombie-like for one more tired go-round.

The result? Episodes that feel almost mean spirited, a shock given the whimsical charm we normally expect. When Carol seemed genuinely happy with Dennis, having Ed too scared to declare his love but wretchedly enough to kiss her behind Dennis's back seemed the worst of

all possible worlds.

Just when Ed seemed tiresome, Carol began dithering again over what to do, making her less attractive as well.

So now it's Carol's wedding day. Hopefully, Carol will walk firmly down the aisle, Ed will be happy for her and even learn to like Dennis in a competitive sort of way.

Then he and Carol can become friends again, friends who have that frisson from wondering what might have been, a feeling that's a lot more pleasant than the knowledge of what failed miserably.

But if "Ed" is as timid as Ed is proving, it might scuttle the romance and put their relationship back to square one. And fans will be left with the knowledge of what failed miserably, which is a lot less fun than the thrilling mystery of what might have been.

ED
WEDNESDAY, 8 p.m., NBC