

One hot, sizzling 'Summer'

WB hit a smart move for 'Full House' star

By MICHAEL GILTZ

6/7/04

THE summer has its first hit. The new drama "**Summerland**," which began last week, was the highest-rated debut in two years for the WB.

And the only reason the show exists is because star Lori Loughlin, the star of the early '90s hit "**Full House**," didn't want to look dumb.

The story goes like this:

When the WB called to set up a meeting, Lori knew one of the first questions would be whether she had any ideas for a series.

"I didn't want to say no; I did it out of not wanting to look dumb," laughs Loughlin, who suddenly looks very smart.

She plays Ava Gregory, a fashion designer who quits her job and suddenly finds herself saddled with three kids after her sister and brother-in-law die in an accident.

"I was in Hawaii on a family vacation when my agent called me about the meeting," says the 39-year-old actress, who is married to fashion designer Mossimo Giannulli. "I hung up the phone and walked out on the beach. I might have had a cocktail; I can't remember. I thought, 'What can I do?'"

"I didn't want to be the mom... And then I thought of this woman who — boom! — one day her life changes on a dime. I wrote it out in longhand and my son, who is 12 [her husband's child from a previous marriage], typed it up on the computer.

"He got to name the three kids. I said, 'Give me a cool name for a boy.' And he said, 'I think Bradin's a cool name.' So that's pretty cool; he got to name all the kids on this show."

No one was more surprised than Loughlin when the executives said they loved it and asked her to meet with Aaron Spelling.

That led to Stephen Tolkin, a Spelling protégé who

writes and is an executive producer on the show. He made his own contribution to the name game.

"I met with Lori at the Polo Lounge and said, 'You know, Ava Gardner probably sat at this table,'" says Tolkin. "And we said, 'Ava!' And that's how we named her character."

With teenagers in lust and an oceanfront setting, comparisons to "**The O.C.**," Fox's summer hit from last season, are inevitable.

"The O.C.' is my favorite show," says Tolkin. "I'm addicted to it. But this show, I wrote the entire pilot before I ever saw it."

Besides, "The O.C." is a classic soap, says Tolkin. "Summerland" is more a family drama. And with a lot more surfing.

In the show, 16-year-old Bradin (played by 16-year-old Jesse McCartney) takes up surfing and develops an immediate crush on his instructor, Erica (Taylor Cole).

"Basically, on 'The O.C.,' Peter Gallagher walks in with wet hair and a surfboard," laughs

Tolkin, brother of screenwriter Michael Tolkin ("The Player") and son of a head writer on "**Your Show of Shows**."

"We're really going to use the beach."

One review put the series down as "Full Beach House."

But the only reviews that matter — the ratings — have been terrific.

In New York and Atlanta, in fact, "Summerland" beat every other network.

Loughlin got waves of congratulatory phone calls, and Tolkin said his mother-in-law even heard people talking about it at the opera.

Apparently, the WB knew what it was doing by launching their best shot at a breakout hit in the first weeks of summer.

"This show was meant to be shown in the summer," says Tolkin. "It screams summer."

It's called 'Summerland' after all."

