

Television

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TV Guide's Battle Of the Beauties

All Together Now: 'Kathie Lee Gifford??'

By Francesca Chapman

Daily News Staff Writer

Nobody called to complain that the idea of a beauty contest was an antiquated one.

Nobody called to say, "This is no way to run a scientific survey."

Instead, they called to say, "You were awfully hard on Kathie Lee!" Or, "We're glad you let Kathie Lee have it."

"It's a surprisingly pungent issue," noted Jack Curry, managing editor of TV Guide.

He was talking about the issue of Who's the Most Beautiful Woman on TV? Or maybe he's talking about this week's issue of TV Guide, now on newsstands. In true People magazine fashion (where Sean Connery is never just "that sterling fellow," but "The Sexiest Man Alive"), TV Guide announced the results of its 1990 TV Beauty Poll. Kathie Lee Gifford is the Most Beautiful Woman on TV.

We were surprised, too.

Turns out Gifford used her morning chat show, "Live with Regis and Kathie Lee," to campaign — vigorously — for the honor.

And in noting how she received more than five times as many votes as the second-place finisher, Jaclyn Smith, TV Guide hinted strongly that Gifford couldn't have done it without cheerleading for herself (yes, literally cheerleading) on the air every day.

That was "unsportsmanlike conduct," tsk-tsked TV Guide.

True, campaigning was not an option open to the likes of, say, Jasmine

And the Winners Are...

1. Kathie Lee Gifford
2. Jaclyn Smith
3. Nicollette Sheridan
4. Delta Burke
5. Melissa Brennan
6. Kirstie Alley
7. Dana Delany
8. Connie Sellecca
9. Stephanie Kramer
10. Jasmine Guy
11. Valerie Bertinelli
12. Phyllis Diller

Guy, who would have had trouble working the vote-for-me lines into the weekly scripts of "A Different World."

When it comes right down to it, the TV Beauty Poll probably doesn't have much to do with beauty. The 17,000 who voted for Gifford doubtless felt they'd forged a special bond with her because she asked them to vote for her.

Delta Burke, who's taken a lot of heat for being "the fat one" on "Designing Women," came in fourth of 53 candidates. Many of the 2,746 people who voted for her are probably just grateful to see someone on TV who's gutsy, talented and not 110 pounds.

And if we're talking seriously about beauty, why was Jane Pauley ranked 14th and Deborah Norville 35th?

It's more likely that these women mean something special to TV viewers. It's the character they portray, the image they have as an actress or journalist.

Because it's TV, the image is important. But if the character or the woman who plays her is a strong enough personality, she'll get votes no matter what she looks like.

Not that this explains how Nicollette Sheridan managed to place third. Guess there were a lot of 19-year-old men voting.

Curry co-wrote a tongue-in-cheek piece accompanying the poll results. A few of the callers he's spoken to since the issue hit the stands have displayed "genuine anger" with the rankings.

"People out there really care about this stuff," he said.

That's undeniable. It's only a tiny fraction of TV Guide's mammoth na-



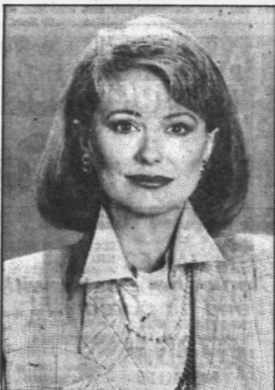
Kathie Lee Gifford: it was a hard-fought campaign



Jasmine Guy: had to lie low



Delta Burke: thin didn't count



Jane Pauley: topped Norville

tional readership, but nearly 100,000 people called to vote.

Curry is considering running a "Most Handsome Man on TV" poll later this year. That raises the alarming spectre of Regis Philbin campaigning every morning on "Live

with Regis and Kathie Lee."

That aside, Curry said, he'd felt the time was just ripe to poll the American public on the TV's most beautiful women.

"It's the summertime, y'know. There's nothing on television."