



THE ORIGIN OF BATGIRL

Yvonne Craig was introduced to boost the ratings.

By Bob Garcia

There was a Batgirl before Barbara Gordon was introduced in *BATMAN*'s third season. In the '50s *Batwoman*'s niece Betty Kane wore a copycat costume of her aunt and fought crime. When *BATMAN* proved to be a hit television series, DC had the idea to revamp the character to get some of the female audience generated by the show.

Batman editor Julius Schwartz was given the task of coming up with a new Batgirl character in April or May of 1966. "I conceived of Batgirl and plotted it with my writer Gardner Fox," said Schwartz. "The whole background of her being Commissioner Gordon's daughter was all part of the story. The artist, Carmine Infantino came up with the costume and the motorcycle. Carmine and Gardner did a story called 'The Million Dollar Debut of

Detective Comics #369, January 1967, art by Carmine Infantino, inspired the show to star Batgirl.



Craig's third season debut astride a Batcycle customized by Dan Magiera.

Batgirl' which appeared in *Detective Comics* #369."

BATMAN's executive producer Bill Dozier was sent a proof copy of the comic and immediately pushed to have the new character added to the show. Designers Patricia Barto and Jan Kemp whipped up a costume, which producer Howie Horwitz reputedly had trouble okaying, because he was color-blind. A casting call went out, and former ballet dancer Yvonne Craig auditioned and was hired. Negotiations were concluded with Yamaha for a new cycle. Four months later, in February 1967, Greenway billed ABC for nearly \$27,000, the cost of making a Batgirl presentation reel.

Craig was 30 when she got the role. "They were really worried that I would tell somebody that," said Craig, who wasn't a fan of the series. A seven-minute presentation reel was shot featur-

ing Batgirl to sell the idea to affiliates and advertisers concerned that *BATMAN* had dropped in the ratings its second season. She starred with Adam West and Burt Ward, and prevented a millionaire from being kidnapped by the Killer Moth (played by Tim Herbert) and his Mothmen.

The presentation reel shows how Barbara Gordon has a secret room in the back of the library with her costume, and how her yellow dress converted into the Batgirl costume, with her hat becoming the cowl, and her skirt doubling as the double-lined satin, purple and gold cape. She even wore the top of her tight-fitting uniform under her dress. Most of these quick-change gimmicks were dropped for the television series.

Craig's costume went through several revisions. "The first time I put it on, it was made of an almost girdle-like fabric. It was not really as thick as neoprene but

was somewhat constricting," recalled Craig. "[Producer] Howie Horwitz took *one* look at me in it, and said to Pat [Barto], 'One of the reasons...No, actually, *two* of the reasons we hired her are being impeded by this costume. The fabric is just smooching her down.' Those were in the days of bullet bras, those old pointy things. So she cut it on the bias and it became quite comfortable and looked good."

One change in Batgirl from the presentation reel to the regular series bothered Craig. It wasn't in the costume, but in her character. "She was much more flirtatious," said Craig. "And she had a lot more droll sense of humor than ever got written into the character on the show."

Craig's first episode was memorable for working with Burgess Meredith: "He loved doing the Penguin, he had such fun with that," said Craig. "He steals me and is going to marry me so he can do dastardly deeds. If he's one of the family he feels nobody is going to arrest him. As a concept, it's my favorite show."

The episode was also memorable for Craig's motorcycle stunt on the first day of the shoot. "I'm supposed to ride my Batcycle out of my secret room," remembered Craig. "I rode a motorcycle at the time. The special effects guy had it rigged so that I would ride down this ramp, turn and they would drop a wall. When I hit my mark on the ramp, I was to give it all the power I could, and it would look like I was riding the wall down."

"I kept my hands near the brake in case the wall didn't go down. Sure enough that's what happened. I gave it full power and I looked up and there was



Craig as Commissioner Gordon's daughter Barbara, turned crimefighter.

no wall going down at all. So I slammed the brakes and went sliding sideways, almost into the wall. On the other side Hubie Kerns, the stunt coordinator, was saying, 'She chickened out.' I was so angry!

"He was thinking I took away a stunt person's job. The second time it worked."

Another fun motorcycle stunt went wrong when Vincent Price was guest-starring as Egghead. "Vincent Price was supposed to ride on the back of my Batcycle," remembered

Craig on the cycle used for a seven-minute presentation reel to help sell advertisers, never broadcast.



Craig "I told him I'd never ridden anybody on the back. It's heavy enough as it was. If it looked like I was going to lose it, I told him to just jump clear. He said, 'I'm so tall that I could stand up and you could ride it out from under me.'"

The action called for Price to jump off the back of the motorcycle and run around to the front. On the second take Craig lurched forward and ran over Price's foot twice. "I seemed to be completely out of control," said Craig. "He was a very good sport about it. He told me that if he knew the scene was going to be played in that way, he would have acted like a matador. When I came at him, he would have shouted: 'Olé!'"

Craig did all of the motorcycle stunts herself, because her double didn't know how to drive one. "She had a great double," said stunt coordinator Kerns. "Audrey Saunders, from the Saunders circus family, and a truly great stunt girl." Even with a stunt double, Craig pushed for more and more stunt work.

"I coerced Howie Horwitz in

letting me do my own fights" said Craig. "He was reticent, because he thought it would be dangerous. He was very protective."

Victor Paul, was responsible for rehearsing with Craig for the fight scenes. "I'd done a lot of dancing at one time," said Paul. "I showed them a lot of moves. We had a double for Yvonne Craig for some of the dangerous stuff. Most of the time they did their own fights. She liked to dance so I'd do a lot of pirouettes and lifts. She did a lot of little kicks and stuff like that."

"I used to put her on top of a table or a pedestal and have the villains come to her, instead of her going to the villains. I would dream up stuff where I would grab her by the waist and throw her to Hubie, and as she goes through the air she'd kick a guy. It was a ballet or an adagio fight."

For all the activity on the set, sometimes Craig found herself standing around for hours, mainly because she couldn't sit down because of her costume. "I had one costume and a spare, but there weren't any more," she said. "Periodically, the knees would bag out and you would have to get them taken in. When the knees started getting baggy, you didn't dare sit down on the set, because it would only make baggier knees. So we spent a lot of time standing around, with Adam looking like they were going to put him up on the cross using a hair dryer on his armpits to dry him off, because—God forbid—he should do anything *human*, like sweat."

By the third season, the production company had slipped into a comfortable schedule. It was maybe a little busier than other television series, because of all the stunt work and makeup time, but still nowhere near the pressure of the first two seasons. "We shot an episode in three days," said Craig. "We would start on Monday, finish it on

“Adam [West] looked like they were going to put him on the cross, using a hairdryer on his armpits—God forbid that he sweat.”

—Actress Yvonne Craig—



Yvonne Craig in the Batgirl costume designed by Patricia Barto and Jan Kemp. Craig had to stand on set because sitting bunched the knees.

Wednesday. Start another one on Thursday, finish it on Tuesday. Start another one on Wednesday, finish that on Friday. Start over again on Monday.

"You're in makeup around 6:30 am, and you're shooting around 8am. Then we stayed there late. They were long days, but wonderful days. So I never minded. They were good people and a great crew. The crew all got along well, really liked one another and worked well together. It was terrific."

Craig acquired a nickname

on the show, an honor usually reserved for the crew, not the cast: "Tom Bishop was the publicist for Fox and he used to call me 'B.B.," said Craig. "Everybody thought that it was for *Batbrod*. He told them that *that* was what it stood for. He told me it was because I have such huge front teeth. It really stood for 'Bucky Beaver.'"

Craig recalled that Adam West had trouble remembering his lines as *Batman*. "I don't know why he couldn't, but he just couldn't," said Craig. "I had this long, long, *long* thing in the London Towers episode. It was a page of dialogue, ending with 'It's in the possession of Barnaby Cats, devil-may-clothier of London.' Then Adam was supposed to say, 'Let's go.' I get to the end of it, and there was dead silence."

"So I said 'Adam, wake up!'"

"He said 'Oh, oh, I'm sorry. What am I supposed to say?'"

"I was so annoyed with him I said, 'You say 'To the Cathouse,' and then we leave.' 'So that's what he said."

"In those days you *couldn't* have said that, but he said it and we didn't cover it. Nobody paid attention. The next day, Howie Horwitz and Bill D'Angelo came down on the set looking like thunder."

"They said, 'We just came from dailies and you said, 'To the Cathouse!'"

You *can't* say "To the *Cathouse!*" You're supposed to say, "Let's go." We can't use that now!" Adam was standing there looking completely bewildered. And I said to him, 'Oh, Adam! That is *disgusting!*' And I left."

Craig is surprised at interest in the show so many years later. "I don't think that any of us dreamed that twenty years later we would even be talking about it," she said. "It was a wonderful, fun job, that you couldn't believe they were paying you to do. But it was a job" □