



U.S. Borax's big gun for 31 years

In the next few weeks, *Death Valley Days* will start its 10th year on television under the sponsorship of United States Borax & Chemical Corp. Oldest of tv's western-locale programs, *Death Valley Days* has carried commercials for the company's consumer products since the fall of 1952, as it did on radio for most of the 20 years before that. During the 1930's and '40's, radio was virtually the only medium used to advertise the "soap sweetener," 20 Mule Team Borax, and the powdered hand soap product, Boraxo, to the general public. Today, television is the company's standard bearer, estimated to account for better than 90% of advertising expenditures of well over \$4 million a year.

It was on Sept. 30, 1930, that the nostalgic bugle call and creak of the 20 mule team wagons were first heard on the air. Starting on NBC, *Death Valley Days* stayed on that network for 11 years, moved to CBS for three more and then was discontinued and replaced with what was first called *Death Valley Sheriff* and then just *The Sheriff*. This series of modern day detective stories in the familiar Death Valley setting, ran on ABC until 1951.

At that time the company switched

the major portion of its advertising budget to magazines—*Good Housekeeping*, *True Story* and *Woman's Home Companion* for 20 Mule Team Borax and *Life* for Boraxo. While magazines carried the national advertising for the borax products, newspapers, radio and the then new medium of television were being tested in various markets.

"But the advantages of being able to demonstrate the various uses of our product in the home led us into television," D. V. Parker, vice president of the 20 Mule Team Products Dept., said last week. "Television was new and it was expensive, but it seemed to pay off.

Why Spot Tv? ■ "We wanted to use one-minute spots, but in 1952 there were so few spots available that program sponsorship seemed a more feasible way to get into tv. In those days—and it's hard to realize they are less than nine years behind us, so rapidly has television developed—the television networks were limited regional hookups, not the nationwide affairs they are today. So we were forced to go into spot television, if we were to use the medium at all on a national scale.

"Fortunately, we had the makings of a television program in our own files—

the 750 scripts from our 14 years of *Death Valley Days* radio broadcasts. Our present day television show was simply an adaptation of our original radio show which we as a sponsor owned, as was the case with other radio sponsors. We merely continued with our property by simply adding the visual proportion to an already successful format. Most fortunately, Ruth Woodman, who had written the original *Death Valley Days* scripts and about eight out of 10 ever since in addition to serving as story editor, was on hand to guide the transition from radio to television.

"You might say we had 'fool's luck' in every aspect of our entry into television," Mr. Parker commented. "In the early 1950's many markets had only one television station. Of the 62 cities in which we launched *Death Valley Days* as a half-hour series, 42 were single station markets. With little or no competition, our program had little trouble in establishing itself and, by the time competition did appear we had amassed a loyal following which stayed with us despite the lure of more novel fare on other channels. From the start, western programs were among the most popular type of tv entertainment and here we were lucky again to have an