

# Thames have the first option on new series

**PROOF** that the days of big spending by the ITV companies are well and truly over comes with the news that a French company, IDTV, headed by Rudolph Roffi, is putting up the £4 million finance for a new series of *The Avengers*.

Almost seven years since Thames produced the 83rd and last episode of the series, Patrick Macnee is returning from the United States to take up the part of John Steed in his fight against crime. He will have two assistants this time, one male, the other female, and the search is now on for an actress to take over where Honor Blackman, Diana Rigg and Linda Thorson left off.

The new series is planned for 30 episodes at a cost of a little over £125,000 each. An independent production company, Avenger Enterprises, will be making the new *Avengers* with Albert Fennell as producer, Brian Clemens as writer-producer and Laurie Johnson composing the music. Brian Clemens wrote the very first *Avengers* script in 1962.

Production is due to start at Pinewood around April of next year using four stages simultaneously. Speaking this week to *Television Today*, Brian Clemens emphasised

that although finance was coming from France, from a company that until now has specialised in making commercials, the British production team had complete editorial control.

"We are making the series for British viewers", he said. "I am sure that the public will welcome the series back on the screen. Although it is more than six years since the series finished its first run, not a week goes by without it being shown in one or other of the 120 countries that have bought it — for a total of around £17 million.

"As for the girl to play Steed's assistant, I am being quite honest when I say that we will look anywhere to find the actress who is just right. We will welcome suggestions from anybody."

The deal between IDTV, Avenger Enterprises and EMI gives a first option to buy rights in the new series to Thames. "It is virtually certain that the *Avengers* will be back on ITV screens by the autumn," says Brian Clemens.

At the moment Clemens is writing the first two scripts. When those are completed, further writers will be engaged to work on the series. A number of directors are being considered, but it is too early yet for any firm commitment to be made.