

Holy Bat Facts!

by Matthew Rainnie

On January 12, 1966, the first episode of the TV show *Batman* was broadcast on ABC. The eagerly anticipated program was derived from the comic-book

character created by Bob Kane in 1939. *Batman*, a half-hour show, was broadcast twice a week and, in those early days, was enormously popular. Adam West starred as Bruce Wayne/Batman, and Burt Ward played his young

companion, Dick Grayson/Robin. A film version with the same cast was released in the same year to capitalize on the show's success. In it, Batman went up against his four major enemies: the Joker (Cesar Romero), the

Penguin (Burgess Meredith), the Riddler (Frank Gorshin), and the Catwoman (Lee Meriwether).

Both the show and the film were light-hearted and fun. Robin spouted meaningless remarks ("Holy laughing gas, Batman!") and Batman possessed some pretty interesting toys (Bat Shark-Repellant is my favourite). As well, who can forget those POW! and SHMACK! balloons that appeared during fist-fights? As with all programs, the initial

popularity of the show waned and the series came to a close on March 14, 1968.

The comic books still thrived, with Batman appearing in many different titles over the years, including *Batman, Detective, The Brave and the Bold*, and *Batman and the Outsiders*. As the times changed, so did the character of Batman. The light-heartedness disappeared and Batman became a more brooding, focussed character. A mini-series, *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, portrayed Batman as an older, cynical, more violent man. The readers enjoyed Batman's solo, "lone wolf" image, and voted in a poll to have Robin killed off.

Batman's popularity jumped another notch when it was announced that another live-action film would be produced and released in 1989. Tim Burton was made director of the project. Many eyebrows were raised when Burton's choice for the role of Batman, Michael Keaton (whom Burton had directed in *Beetle-juice*), was announced. People had trouble visualizing the thin, generally comic actor as the Dark Knight. However, when two-time Academy Award winner Jack Nicholson was signed to play the Joker, interest perked up once again.

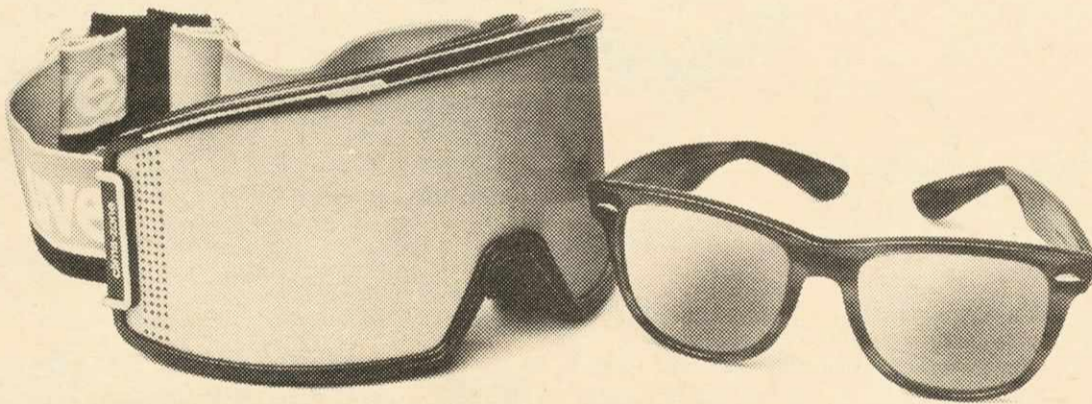
The film itself deals with the creation of the Joker and his plans to take over Gotham City by poisoning toiletries (such as shampoo and makeup). Jack Nicholson gives a remarkable performance as the Joker. Michael Keaton does a good job as Batman, but he is completely overshadowed by Nicholson. Kim Basinger plays Bruce Wayne's girlfriend, Vicki Vale, with style.

The release of *Batman* to video on November 15th gives the two or three people who didn't see it at the theatre a chance to see it at home. A small piece of advice: don't think you're going to see the best film of all time. *Batman* is an enjoyable film, but it is also quite over-rated, and expectations may be high when renting it.

Of course, there will be a *Batman* sequel. There have been many rumours as to who's going to be in it. Michael Keaton will return for the sequel, but, for fear of being typecast, he will do another major film first. It has been said that Jack Nicholson will return for a \$25 million salary. Now, let me share with you the other rumours in circulation. Either Danny DeVito or Dustin Hoffman will play the Penguin. Robin Williams will play the Riddler. Cher will play the Catwoman. Michael J. Fox or Michael Jackson (!?) will play Robin. We'll have to wait to see if any of these are justified rumours.

This year marks Batman's fiftieth anniversary, and character is more popular than ever. The Batman phenomenon may never die.

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