

WA REALITY



Ian and Katy have their first tiff in *Desperately Seeking Sheila* tonight.

Rustic and romantic

Desperately Seeking Sheila, the delightful WA-made series about young men in rural Australia, has proven to be a hit on a number of levels.

In this week's final episode the relationships are all drawn to a conclusion — with some fascinating results.

Love has blossomed for some, but others have crashed out on the road to love. Either way local producer Artemis International has shown that a reality program can be useful as well as entertaining.

The \$2.4 million television series is also being screened on Britain's ITV as well as SBS in Australia.

There's a gender imbalance in the Outback and rural Australia, with many women choosing to leave the isolation of the bush for a life in town.

It's left a lot of lonely men behind — and lonely men find it hard to be on the land.

The WA Farmers Federation, knowing that it's almost impossible to run a farm of any size single-handedly, raised the issue publicly in the hope of averting a significant social and economic crisis.

Local primary producers Celia Tait and Brian Beaton were inspired to explore this issue for

television and to find out just where things were going wrong for the Outback bachelor.

More than 70 bush bachelors signed up for some help to meet a potential partner, and more than 1200 single British women and 200 single Australian women applied to be matched to a bush bachelor.

The four bachelors selected represent a varied slice of multicultural rural Australia and were aged between 25 and 47 years old.

Over the past five weeks a couple of those bachelors have proven themselves deserving of a better hand than fate has thrown them in terms of women.

All-round nice guy and deli owner Mike, from remote Newman in the Pilbara, is twice divorced with three kids.

Mike is ready to start a new life with a nice woman.

This week we discover whether Alison is that woman.

Yabby farmer Ian from Kukerin (population 50) has fallen head over heels in love with Katy, but this week there's a stumbling block as tempers flare when they prepare for a big community party in the family shed.

Can the relationship overcome

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Ian and Katy share a kiss — but have they really found true love?

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its first real argument? We'll see.

The other two blokes? Well...

Wheat and sheep farmer Ashley from Wickiepin has been a millionaire since he inherited the family farm 10 years ago and reckons he's a great catch for a prospective Sheila.

But he hasn't proved the Wheatbelt's most alluring man, and this week it comes to a crunch with Debs.

Indian immigrant Pankaj has been spending time with hotel co-worker Shianne — creating suspicions of a previous relationship. But his proposed "match", Nicky, seems to have found in bachelor Kael something more akin to the genuine kind of bloke she is looking for among the beaches and wineries of Margaret River.

Over a weekend in Perth, each bachelor dated three women before picking one to spend a month working with him and living the life of a bush Sheila.

Now the time has come to find out what these women really made of the four bush Aussies.

The series, shot between January and May 2004 in WA and in the UK, has been a thoughtful look at the bush boys' plight, with plenty of fun, romance and intrigue along the way. But it has highlighted a genuine problem.

The series offered no instant celebrity, no prizes, no product placements — just friendship and the possibility of true love.

And it has proved a winner.

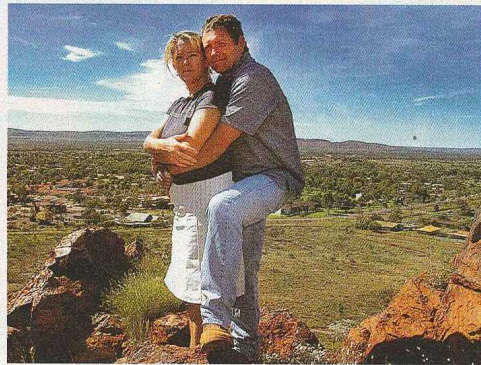
Head of SBS Television, Shaun Brown, says the collaboration with Carlton TV was a major achievement.

"It's our first ever program partnership with the UK's major commercial channel, ITV," he says. "It's a great fit for our charter — bringing light to a significant social and cultural issue in an entertaining and informative manner."

Even if you haven't watched earlier episodes it's worth tuning in for this final look at our four bushmen in their search for love.

ALLEN NEWTON

Desperately Seeking Sheila
Sunday, 7.30pm, SBS.



Mike shows Alison the rugged Pilbara in *Desperately Seeking Sheila*.