

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

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**Documentaries**

10 x 30 minutes

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**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

Healing sick animals is a vocation

National Television Awards 1999  
Most Popular Documentary

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### Introduction

*Vets in Practice*, a prime-time docusoap, first transmitted on BBC1 in 1997 and quickly became established as a firm favourite with viewers of all ages and turned Trude Mostue, Steve Leonard and their colleagues into household names. As the young vets do their best to treat sick and injured animals, this fly-on-the-wall series has millions of British viewers hanging off the edge of their seats with its warmth, honesty and sometimes heart-stopping moments.

Trude Mostue, Mike Sandiford, Steve Leonard first appeared in the BBC1's hugely successful *Vets' School*, which followed their training. The series also introduces new characters from the same year also about to embark upon their first months in veterinary practice.

While Trude grapples with her first injection and her first emergency, Steve – who has been voted one of *Company* magazine's 50 most eligible bachelors – performs surgery on Roger the rabbit and copes with his fan mail, and Mike captures crocodiles and treats jackals in Botswana.

The young vets take on dramatic, tear-jerking but quite often hilarious animal cases while also dealing with the ups and downs of their personal lives. Their loves, their hates and the inevitable stresses and strains that go with the job are all captured on camera.

As they face the toughest year of their professional lives, how will they cope in the months to come?

**Documentaries**

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**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### Production Credits

Narrator

**Christopher Timothy**

*(All Creatures Great And Small)*

Series Producer

**Nick Shearman**

Executive Producer

**Grant Mansfield**

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### The Vets

**Trude Mostue** became famous for her disastrous attempt to inject a kitten in *Vets' School*, as well as her difficulties over learning English. "When *Vets' School* was being filmed, there were times when I just wanted to give up and go back to Norway," she says. "But now I feel like staying in Britain for ever. I love the people, the animals and the countryside. Encouraged by the flood of fan mail from fans and their pets, Trude starts her career at a practice in Bristol. On the first morning at work, she admits: "Last night I was so nervous I was really struggling hard to sleep. I suddenly realised that this is the test. It's starting now." In her first week the tension mounts as she treats Jess, a boxer dog with a mystery virus.

**Steve Leonard** works at a veterinary practice in Lancaster. In his first week as a vet he treats a rabbit named Roger, whose only hope is an operation to mend a broken leg. Later in the series, he is invited to become one of the United Kingdom's "50 most eligible bachelors", courtesy of *Company* magazine. Steve has been inundated with fan mail from admiring ladies since his appearance on *Vets' School*, but is too engrossed in his first year of work to worry about girlfriends. "I went out with a girl for two months once and saw her about three to four times in that period. That was it, I think. Before that it was about two weeks. A week and a half to two weeks is about the natural length of a relationship. Any more, and there's something seriously wrong." Steve, however, is prepared to commit himself to an 18-year relationship with orphaned kittens which he adopts from the practice.

**Emma Milne** and **Joe Inglis** are the two new faces for *Vets In Practice*. They both graduated from Langford in the same year as the other vets, and because of their relationship, they have chosen neighbouring practices in the beautiful Devon countryside. Joe works at Bideford and Emma works in nearby Dulverton. "We did split up twice and for one month over exams, but it's been much better since," says Emma. Joe agrees: "It's got a fairly sort of serious feel to it now which it never had before."

**Mike Sandiford** took the summer off after graduating, before taking the job as a resident vet at an animal orphanage in the heart of Botswana. Apprehension sets in as he awaits the flight to a new career: "I'm not really sure what to expect... I just want to get off the plane on the other side. That's when I'll start feeling I've actually got there." During his time in Africa, Mike has to make the most of the basic amenities that the practice offers to ensure the animals' welfare. Memorable moments of his time in Botswana include castrating a jackal on his bedroom table and hunting for crocodiles.

**Julie Richards** starts work at a small practice in Builth Wells in mid-Wales. In her first week, she tackles the sensitive issue of euthanasia as she puts a collie dog called Peggy to sleep. Julie soon finds herself in conflict with her new boss and decides she cannot stay. "I know it doesn't look good staying in a job for only three months. It was a difficult decision to come to, but there are so many things that bother me about the practice." Luckily, Julie finds work in the Runcorn practice where she originally trained. Will she be able to make a go of it this time?

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

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### The Vets

**Fiona Green** took the summer off to go to Turkey, but returns to start her veterinary career at Bodmin, Cornwall. Although she is nervous, Fiona is carried by her inner confidence: "So much of veterinary stuff is to do with technique, and as well as strength, you need stamina. I may not have the world's hugest muscles, but I've got stamina!"

**Alison Lee** was one of only six honours students from Langford and she is used to working hard at her practice near Bristol where there is a deluge of patients.

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### Episode Synopses

**1.** Trude Mostue finally starts her new job in a Bristol practice, where very quickly she has to deal with her first injection and a lop-eared rabbit called Cherub that urinates all over her. A more challenging case is Jess the boxer dog, who has serious internal bleeding. Trude is puzzled about the cause. As Jess' anxious owner looks on, can she save the dog before it loses too much blood?

Julie Richards has joined a one-man practice in mid-Wales. She had difficulties with Dr Kieran O'Brien at Langford Vet School; now she finds herself in conflict with her new boss, Bertie Ellis. Bertie insists that she takes further lessons before he lets her loose on his clients: "She needs some experience," he says. "She has a lot to learn and for the first two years after you've qualified, you're never going to be much good." Julie is not too impressed. "He made me feel like a student again," she complains. On top of everything else she has to put Peggy, a collie dog, to sleep in the lap of its tearful owner.

Emma Milne's first late shift alone at the new Dulverton practice turns rapidly into a nightmare. Beth the dog is brought in by its owners, and she fears that the pet may have internal bleeding. This is uncharted territory for Emma as Beth stops breathing. In the race against time, Emma revives the dog, but is depressed to find in the morning that the animal did not make it through the night. Before Emma can recover from the ordeal, she has to deal with Honey, a dog who has grown up with a pig and has a mystery illness.

Steve Leonard also has a nerve-racking time when Roger the rabbit is brought in with a broken ankle. Steve has to amputate Roger's leg, but during the operation, the rabbit dies under anaesthetic. Naturally, Steve is shaken by the incident. "It was quite a major procedure for a very small and young rabbit to go through," he says.

**2.** As the vets settle into their careers, *Vets in Practice* reveals more about their private lives, including the stresses of living with staggering overdrafts which they have accrued from five years of studying.

Trude Mostue manages to save Jess the boxer dog from its mystery illness, much to the relief of its owner. With her new-found confidence, combined with a regular income, she decides to move to a new flat (in spite of her £30,000 overdraft), helped by her sports journalist boyfriend, Hector.

Joe Inglis has the most unusual day to date as he sets off to clip the toenails of a houseful of parrots. The young vet believes he has experienced the worst, until he has to handle Ricky, a dog with a bottom problem.

Emma Milne deals with a hound that has been gored by a stag. Although her initial treatment for the animal appears successful, the dog tragically dies from its wounds.

Meanwhile, Julie Richards has a visit from the Davis family whose terrier, Rosie, has been having behavioural problems. Julie tells the family that unless Rosie can calm down, they may have to consider putting the terrier to sleep.

**Documentaries**

**10 x 30 minutes**

**BBC** Worldwide

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## SERIES 1

### Episode Synopses

**3.** At Julie Richards' practice in mid-Wales, the Davis family return with Rosie the terrier, who has behavioural problems. This time, Rosie has bitten the family's youngest child. Julie has to warn them: "You don't know how nasty it's going to be next time. I think you've really got to consider putting her to sleep though, if she's biting the children." A day later, Rosie has bitten the children again, and the family has to make an agonising decision.

Alison Lee has a challenging first case at her Bristol practice; she has to remove the thyroid gland from Patch, a 13-year-old Siamese cat. Initially, the operation is a success but later in the day she develops a blood clot and there is nothing Alison can do to save her. The only comfort she can offer the owners is that Patch died very quickly. She too is upset by the crisis: "I don't think it's something you can ever get used to."

Steve Leonard is also coping with his own trauma at the Lancaster practice: "I've had a real nightmare. I've made my first error of judgement which resulted in a heifer dying. It's a mistake that was easy to make, but something I shouldn't have made." He has little time to brood, however. *Company* magazine has chosen him as one of Britain's top 50 most eligible bachelors and invited him to one of London's exclusive night-clubs. Steve impresses the ladies as he dances the night away. "This man needs a woman," declares one fashion editor.

Julie Richards, meanwhile, is finding her job in Wales too quiet. "Every day for the past two weeks, I've finished before twelve," she says. After the heartbreak of putting down Rosie the dog earlier in the day, she decides to hand in her notice. "I know it doesn't look good, staying in a job for only three months. It was a difficult decision to come to, but there are so many things that bother me about the practice. I just don't enjoy working here."

**4.** Back from holiday, a tanned Fiona Green starts work in a new practice in Cornwall. With her is boyfriend Nick, a diving instructor she met in Turkey. She tries to prepare for her first day: "This morning I was sitting in bed re-reading through all my small-animal medicine to get back into the frame of things, so I feel nervous because of that." Apprehension sets in as she thinks of the day ahead. "The farmer we're visiting is quite a big client... I don't want to mess up on my first day on my first call."

In Botswana, Mike Sandiford is settling into the way of life. "I've just loved it since I've been here. I love the people, who are so friendly. You go into the local bars here and everyone says hello and shakes your hand. It's really nice." His first operation is to castrate a jackal to prevent it from breeding in captivity. His operating theatre is his bedroom.

In Bristol, Trude Mostue has completed two months practice and is growing in confidence. The practice nurse, Yvonne Adams, is full of praise after Trude successfully performs a tricky dental operation on a cat: "I think she's doing really well because English is not her first language. You have to be extremely clever to get into vet school and even cleverer to pass. She knows her stuff and she does it."

Julie Richards hears some good news after resigning from her Welsh practice – a letter from the Runcorn centre in Cheshire where she trained, offering her a job.

**Documentaries**

**10 x 30 minutes**

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### Episode Synopses

**5.** Despite a good start in Botswana, Mike Sandiford soon becomes frustrated by the lack of work. "I'm not really doing as much with the animals as I would like," he says. "Maybe 20 to 30% of my work is animal-related, the rest is just helping out." But Mike soon has his hands full: a crocodile has been attacking the animals at a neighbouring farm. Cameras film Mike and the hired hands surrounding the crocodile in a deep swamp, then trapping it with a net before taking it back to the reserve. Next day, Mike's success makes the front page of the local paper, turning him into a local celebrity. In Cornwall, Fiona Green performs her first operation as a fully-qualified vet. Edna Greenhalsh's cat, Harvey, is suffering from malignant tumours on both ears "I haven't done a great deal of surgery and I've never done this before," she says as she prepares for the delicate operation to remove the cat's ears. "So I'm definitely nervous, and also to have the senior partner standing over you doesn't exactly build your confidence." Fortunately, the operation is a success. Young graduate Hannah Pollard begins her first day at a surgery in Nottinghamshire. Spot, an Irish wolfhound with a swollen leg, is brought in by owner Arthur Whittaker. Hannah has to x-ray the animal. This is normally a simple procedure, but Spot is enormous and it takes three people to lift him onto the x-ray table.

**6.** Emma Milne faces her greatest challenge to date as a vet when she is forced to shoot a sheep. Farmer David Simpson has brought in a pregnant sheep that has been bleeding for hours. David believes that the animal is carrying twins, and Emma realises that there is only one course of action: "Really, the only option for you is to shoot her or put her to sleep very quickly and take the lambs out and see if they're still viable. We have done it before, but you have to be quick. It's got to be bang and cut." Although the procedure sounds brutal, shooting the sheep is the most humane way of dealing with the tricky situation. Don Elliott, Emma's boss, persuades her that she has to learn to overcome her queasiness and handle the situation. "I was absolutely terrified before I did that," says Emma after the operation. "I hated it. My heart was just pounding."

**7.** An Alsatian pup called Fay has swallowed a plastic toy tree and Trude Mostue decides that the only way to remove it is to operate. An orphaned lamb with a bloated belly has been brought into Alison Lee's practice, and the only way to relieve the problem is to siphon out the lamb's stomach contents. The grateful owner names the orphan after the young vet, but will Alison the lamb survive the night? In Runcorn, Julie Richards is back at the practice where she started as a student. Under the eye of senior vet Ken Robinson, she tackles a routine operation with an unusual instrument. "Things can go really, really wrong, and that's what I find is nerve-racking," she says. But all goes well and Ken is impressed. More taxing is a "thug" of a cat called Mogley, who may have lost his appetite but still tries to take a bite out of Julie's arm. While Julie admits her love life is being affected by the long working hours, Alison Lee and her boyfriend Craig Beck (who is also a vet) decide to get married. In Lancashire, Steve Leonard is busy fitting a nose-ring on a bull which weighs as much as a car and doing a pregnancy scan on two goats.

**Documentaries**

**10 x 30 minutes**

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### Episode Synopses

**8.** Trude Mostue is called upon to attend an emergency lambing. She has gained most of her experience working with small animals, now she decides to try to overcome one of her biggest fears – horses. At her first riding lesson, Trude's biggest question is: "How do I get down?" Meanwhile in Cornwall, Bell, a collie dog with a womb infection, needs an operation. Fiona Green hopes that she will be the one to perform it. So far, she has spent most of her time in Bodmin treating large animals, and she needs more experience in treating small animals. Frustrated with the lack of veterinary work at the animal orphanage in Botswana, Mike Sandiford has decided to return to England. First, though, he has to return an angry, spitting cat to the wild at a site 150 miles away. At the annual Vets' Ball, Trude faces an awkward moment when she comes face to face with her former tutor, Dr Kieran O'Brien. Her worries were unnecessary. "Trude has made a good effort to gain experience where it is most needed, especially with horses. I'm amazed at how well she has done, perhaps I misjudged her," says Dr O'Brien.

**9.** Emma and Joe discuss their future together as they celebrate their anniversary with a bottle of champagne on the beach. The mood turns sour when the subject of marriage is raised. Joe accuses Emma of trying to "anchor down her man". The graduates are also growing increasingly frustrated with the more mundane aspects of the job. Emma is unhappy with the isolation she feels in her small country practice, while Hannah becomes exasperated when her boss insists they shave a cat virtually bald. With Spring comes new life, but also difficult pregnancies. Emma and Hannah both have to carry out Caesareans. Emma operates on a ewe that is giving birth to twins, but one is already dead and hope is fading for its sibling. Hannah successfully delivers four puppies, but the celebrations are cut short when they take too long to start breathing. When Emma receives the bill following an expensive car crash, she finds that she's not the only one struggling with her finances. Joe has a client who cannot afford the bill for her dog's ear treatment. He genuinely sympathises and is forced to compromise, agreeing to do the operation at a reduced fee.

**10.** It's early April and the young vets are now over halfway through their first year as professionals. In Lancaster, Steve Leonard is playing tutor to brother Keith, youngest of four veterinary brothers and the only one still to qualify. Keith's final exams are in two months. Relaxing at home one evening, roles are reversed when Keith gives Steve a guitar lesson. Alison Lee has to deal with a dangerous customer – a goose with a badly broken wing. "I know he bites," she says, "so I'm going to wrap him in a towel." The decision to operate is an act of love by owner Claire Stowell, as the procedure will cost more than the total worth of her eight geese. After the operation, Alison and her mother attend a wedding fair in search of ideas. In Devon, Joe Inglis has to deal with a rowdy parrot named Freddie. Later he skates off to the local park to test his latest invention – the "Grassboard" – a surfboard on wheels. Joe is hoping to raise some investment for his idea and his girlfriend, Emma Milne, joins him to film a publicity video. In Bristol, Trude Mostue has to deal with Chester, a golden labrador with a swollen neck. Trude suspects he has been bitten. "It could be an insect," Trude concludes, "or even a snake."

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### Ratings

Episode	UK Txn Date	Channel	Time On	Viewers	% Audience Share
1	26.08.97	BBC1	20.00	8.0 million	38.3
2	29.08.97	BBC1	20.30	8.2 million	36.0
3	02.09.97	BBC1	20.00	8.1 million	38.4
4	05.09.97	BBC1	20.00	8.0 million	36.9
5	09.09.97	BBC1	20.00	6.3 million	28.6
6	12.09.97	BBC1	20.00	6.8 million	29.8
7	19.09.97	BBC1	20.00	9.2 million	40.1
8	23.09.97	BBC1	20.00	7.4 million	32.3
9	03.10.97	BBC1	20.00	6.9 million	29.7
10	10.10.97	BBC1	20.00	7.1 million	29.5

### What The Papers Say

"...it's got most of my favourite things. Cats, dogs, horses and an array of highly trained, intelligent blondes." *The Times*

"The veracity, wit, and dramatic tension of this real-life veterinary series ... Producer Nick Shearman fully deserves the continuing success that his series is enjoying, because each programme so far has managed to be thoroughly entertaining without resorting to snide commentary or obvious fakery ... Here, one feels simultaneously on the side of the experts, the owners, and the animals ... I'm completely hooked, even though I'm not a committed animal lover." *Evening Standard*

"Personally I find the animal lovers in the fly-on-the-wall series more fascinating than their pets." *Mirror*

"*Vets in Practice* has been registering 11.5 on my Ahhh-ometer over the past few weeks ... in Bristol, the needle on my Ahhh-ome-ter swung so far to the right that it got bent and will now have to be repaired, when Jennie became cataplectic after spending several hilarious hours trying to stuff her moggy Sophie into a box. Not even the sight of a thoroughly unhygienic-looking dog sniffing at the camera lens could break the enchantment ... and Jenny's protracted duel with Sophie is one of the few occasions on which television has made me laugh out loud this year." *Evening Standard*

"I guarantee on Friday night that the entire nation (including this TV reviewer) will dissolve at the sight of George who, thanks to cancer, has grown a second mouth." *Evening Standard*

**Documentaries**

10 x 30 minutes

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### What The Papers Say

**Mirror: August 25, 1997**

10 million saw her cry when she failed, now Trude is Britain's favourite TV star

Trude Mostue flicks back her long blonde hair and, with an air of confidence, listens to the cow's heartbeat. Then she whips on a latex glove and prepares for a close encounter of the veterinary kind.

These are the pictures ten million TV viewers thought they'd never see. For Trude is the woman who had convinced everyone she would fail to make it as a vet. In the BBC's gripping documentary, *Vet School*, the stunning Norwegian desperately tried to get to grips with the animal world. Fans of the series took her to their hearts as she fluffed her practical work, botched an injection on a kitten and was ticked off by her tutor for not doing enough revision. As she sat sobbing alone in a classroom after flunking another exam, it seemed as if Trude's final year at Bristol University would end in disaster.

But she passed her re-sits and she's now a fully qualified-vet working at a Bristol practice. And you can see how 29-year-old Trude is getting on in *Vets In Practice*, the follow-up the fly-on-the wall hit.

It cost the former goatherd £30,000 to realise her dream. "I am twice as much in debt as any vet student in Britain," says Trude. "I'm paying back the loan at £200 a month and with interest it's going to take me 20 years." But it's a small price to pay. My job is very important to me. It's all I've ever wanted. At last I can do the job I trained to do for all those years. "Even if it does mean having to stick my arm up a cow's bottom."

When the BBC cameras followed the progress of the final-year veterinary trainees, Trude became an overnight star. In the new series, Trude really weaves some animal magic. Saving a boxer dog's life after it is struck by a mystery illness and performing surgery on a puppy to remove a toy train from its stomach are among the highlights. A vet's life has its drawbacks, though. Trude works from 9am to 8pm, healing animals and trudging through muddy fields – she has even suffered the indignity of being urinated on by a rabbit.

But apart from the drab clothes she has to wear as a vet and the long hours that leave her shattered, she couldn't be happier. "I got the job two weeks after qualifying. And the best thing was they had never seen me on TV," says Trude. "At first I was very nervous, even when I qualified, but I'm really enjoying my new life. "There were times when we were filming *Vets School* when I just wanted to give up and go back to Norway. "But if you really want to achieve something you just have to rely on your will power and tell yourself that you'll get there in the end."

**Documentaries**

**10 x 30 minutes**

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### What The Papers Say

#### Mirror.../2

Trude was accepted by Bristol University six years ago as part of an exchange deal with the Norwegian government. She had no grant, a huge government loan, her grasp of English was less than perfect and she was painfully shy. "Some tutors didn't realise that being quiet doesn't mean that you are stupid," says Trude. "The language thing was always a problem. It was very hard. People didn't make allowances for the fact that English was not my first language. So I had to learn it at the same time as trying to learn veterinary science. Because I spent all my time at university listening and reading, I didn't really practise speaking English until I qualified. There were times when I got very down." When Trude failed her final surgery exams and was seen crying by millions of TV fans, her parents and three sisters flew to Britain to be near her. "Everyone else was celebrating their successes. But for me it was a very lonely time," she says. "My family were wonderful. Far from saying I was a failure, they said I had achieved so much by passing most of the exams. "The whole family had come over when they thought I was going to graduate. When I didn't we had a big party and celebrated anyway. "Then we flew back to Norway and I cried for two whole days. After that it all seemed OK. I realised it wasn't the end of the world."

Following another three months' hard work, Trude passed the paper on animal surgery which had been her downfall. Her parents again came over to Bristol and this time they did see her qualify. Now they are watching *Vet School* which is being screened for a second time in Norway. "It's really strange seeing the series in Norway. It's the second time they've shown it there – but the first time it didn't have subtitles so it didn't mean much to anyone. "Now my mother knows exactly what's going on and laughs and cries in the right places. People realise that it has a happy ending."

Instead of staying in Norway, Trude decided to make her home in Britain, which will delight her admirers. Her Scandinavian good looks have won her an army of male followers. But the hundreds of men who wrote to her protesting their love and offering marriage will be disappointed. For Trude has a man in her life. "It's very charming to think people take the time to sit down and tell you how beautiful they think you are," says Trude. "All the letters I've had have been lovely. There was only one scare and that was when a big parcel arrived for me at the BBC. "The security men all came round and examined it. "But it turned out to be a box of chocolates. I was very, very moved by people being so nice to me. They all wanted me to do well. "It makes a change from Norway where people are so cool. "In Britain you are so much warmer about things." Marriage doesn't figure in her plans – yet. I can't see myself getting married. I don't really believe in it, unless I meet Mr Right and then I might marry him tomorrow."

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### What The Papers Say

**Sunday Times: August 24, 1997**

Forget the soaps: The new stars are to be found in documentaries that star real people.

Here is a short TV quiz. Which profession is more likely to earn you a leading role on television: (a) veterinary surgeon; (b) airport employee or (c) actor? Producers and actors should never work with animals or children – true or false? What is the new formula for making highly profitable, ratings-boosting popular documentary series?

The answers are (a) and (b); false; and "documentary soap", which is television's new rock'n' roll now that sitcom has apparently bitten the dust.

Scan the schedules from the past few years and you will be hard-pressed to find an institution that would not be able to include "as seen on..." in its recruitment ad. It won't be long before screen tests and microphone-technique training are offered to anybody joining any of the following (all of which have had the cameras in): the emergency and customs services, the armed forces, the northern-club circuit, the fashion industry, a lifeboat, driving school, taxi firm, GP and veterinary surgeon, various hospital wards, London Zoo and the Royal Opera House. In the autumn, a hotel, a music school, the port of Dover, a holiday-rep company, Bath rugby club and the immigration service will be added to that list.

This week, BBC1 starts transmitting *Vets in Practice* (VIP), a huge 20-part docu-soap that goes out twice a week as the sequel to *Vets' School*, which last year followed six veterinary students from Bristol. *VIP* now films them during their first year of employment and if the original series is an accurate barometer, it will probably attract more than 10m viewers.

Grant Mansfield, the executive producer, who was also responsible for *Driving School*, claims that the key to these series is the quality of the contributors. "The subjects have to be really likable and sympathetic," he says. His most successful stars are undoubtedly Mo, who lost her nerve and her cook, and ran over her husband's foot in *Driving School*; Trude, the glamorous Norwegian vet who made a spectacular hash of vaccinating a cat; and Steven, her bachelor peer with the movie-star looks whose romances tend to last a tantalising "one or two weeks at most". Mo has been given her own series, Trude is being courted by several television companies, and they all receive sackloads of fan mail. Trude had thousands of letters of support over the cat incident.

Mansfield claims that *VIP* is the documentary version of *All Creatures Great and Small* (Christopher Timothy even does the narration), but update that with a touch of *This Life*, BBC2's yuppie drama over which a nation is mourning, and the comparison is more accurate. The vets are a group of eligible twentysomethings, whose private lives offer a parallel narrative to the emotional moments provided by sick and injured animals.

**Documentaries**

**10 x 30 minutes**

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### What The Papers Say

#### Sunday Times.../2

Jeremy Mills, whose catalogue of successes includes *The Doctor*, *The Vet*, *X-Cars* (which pulled a staggering 14m viewers), *Airport* (10m) and *Children's Hospital* (10m), believes the key to the success of these docu-soaps lies in the characters, the drama, the humour and the narrative that could never be developed in a one-off documentary. And, of course, the primetime scheduling that marks a first for factual television, usually hidden in the "soft slots". More important still, is the feelgood factor.

"We see the contributors dealing with stress in settings we are familiar with, and resolving it," says Mills. In other words, we all like to see mistakes being made (part *Schadenfreude*, part 'There but for the grace of God') just as much as we like happy endings. "And, as in a soap," Mills adds, "if you don't like one of the characters, you know we will switch back to one of your favourites before long." He also admits that he was lucky with *The Vet* and *The Doctor*, which appeared a decade ago, because "comedy and light entertainment weren't working that well at the time. We proved that you could get a large audience and that allowed us to be more creative." By the same token, will there be an end to this trend, especially since a camera crew seems to have been through every tradesman's entrance in the country already? "Absolutely," Mills says. "It only needs a few failures and people will suddenly say: 'They don't work any more', as with sitcoms now. This is where the proliferation is dangerous."

But docu-soaps are not likely to be curbed by the programme-makers, because they are extremely cheap. According to Mansfield: "All my directors go out with their own camera because it helps the intimacy, and a director on his or her own costs a lot less than an entire crew. Also, the technology means you can put a remote-control camera on the back seat of a car (*Driving School*), behind the exam results (*Vets' School*) or in a fireman's helmet (*Firefighters*)."

So confident are Mansfield and Mills in their success that Mills and two BBC colleagues have set up an independent company, Lion Productions, where he is planning "to move the concept on, so that it becomes even more of a soap, concentrating on the personal lives of the subjects rather than a specific job". Will it be set in Liverpool, Mills's favourite hunting ground for humorous contributors? He is not saying, but it sounds as though he has discovered the ultimate television genre: *Vets in Practice* meets *This Life* up *Brookside* Close. Or docu-drama-tragi-comic-soap, as it will no doubt be called in the business.

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

**BBC** Worldwide

# Vets in Practice

## SERIES 1

### Other programmes about vets

**Vet School**

6 x 30'

Follows eight vet students in their fifth and final year of training at Langford Vet School.

**Vets in the Wild**

8 x 30'

Trude Mostue and Steve Leonard on a field trip in Africa

**Vets in the Wild Special: Polar Bear**

1 x 50'

Trude and Steve encounter danger and tragedy on a trip to the Arctic

**Vets to the Rescue**

30 x 30' or 15 x 50'

Trude and a team of animal experts set up a marquee in Chester Zoo

Future Production:

**Ultimate Killers**

6 x 30' or 3 x 60'

Steve Leonard pits his wits against the most deadly creatures in nature

**Documentaries**

10 x 30 minutes