

Dallas born again with renewable energy and less greed

Swaggering displays of extravagant wealth are out, but the rivalry is as strong as ever, writes **Tim Teeman**

Rays of sun glint off a familiar white-fronted house, iron gates marked "SF", and — if the familiar twang of these music hasn't stirred your memory — a belt with a "JR" buckle. After a 21-year absence (ignoring a few lamentable mini-series), *Dallas* returns to American television on Wednesday as the children of JR and Bobby Ewing battle for control of ... what else but Ewing Oil? Bobby groans to JR, "I don't want them to be like us," but *plus ça change*...

Despite the familiar Southfork whirl of greed, jealousy and love triangles, producers promise a radically altered show from the *Dallas* of yore, which frothed so wildly that one season was explained away as a dream when Patrick Duffy, who played Bobby, returned to the show even though his character had died. The revelation of "Who shot JR?" in 1980 (answer, Kristin Shepard) secured what was America's highest TV audience of 83 million (in Britain, 21.6 million).

The new *Dallas* — on the cable channel TNT rather than CBS, its broadcast network home between 1978 and 1991 — reflects a changed America, featuring business done on laptops rather than over Scotches at Ewing Oil and a



The new *Dallas* features key actors from the 1980s cast, top right, but the storylines will reflect a changed America



Not only are the characters different, so are the two eras of *Dallas*. The original was streaked with the Reaganite 1980s, the mythology of the Old West and unfettered capitalism reflected by the show. Today the rich lack the swagger, at least on TV dramas: viewers are more used to seeing outrageous extravagance on reality shows. Recession-era America still likes stories of success, but overt greed is eyed balefully.

Cynthia Cidre, writer and executive producer, says that the new *Dallas* will not "devolve into camp or cheap melodrama", but be "a smart, passionate drama on an epic scale". This is a "continuation", not a remake and she believes that audiences will be thrilled.

Hagman, 80, has throat cancer and looks frail, but insists: "*Dallas* is the most fun I've ever had in my life. It feels like coming home."

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spirit of nifty entrepreneurialism rather than patrician entitlement.

The Stetson count seems lower. However Larry Hagman reprises his role as JR, grinning like a malevolent Cheshire Cat, Duffy is the saintly Bobby and Linda Gray returns as Sue Ellen, who in her alcoholic years would slur

"Damn you JR". "We've been friends for 33 years," says Gray. Ken Kercheval (Cliff Barnes), Steve Kanaly (Ray Krebbs) and Charlene Tilton (Lucy Ewing) will make guest appearances.

Hagman says that the younger cast carry most of the action, "so I can remain behind the scenes and make trou-

ble". JR's son John Ross (Josh Henderson) wants to drill for oil on Southfork, Christopher (Jesse Metcalfe), a goodie like his dad, wants to stop him and focus Ewing Oil on renewable energy. His true love Elena (Jordana Brewster) is John Ross's girlfriend, while Bobby is married to Ann (Brenda Strong.)

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