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# WITH DAVID NIVEN,

**A** FEW DAYS before David Niven finished his starring part in United Artists' "The Pink Panther," he was interviewed on an Italian television show.

Trying to be complimentary, the interviewer introduced David as "one of the world's 10 best-dressed men." To the interviewer's surprise—and the shock of the television audience—David ripped off his coat, pulled his shirt out of his trousers, and pointed at the cut-off part of his shirt tail.

"I needed the material to redo the worn-out shirt collar and cuffs," Niven said, then explained that his reputation as one of the best-dressed men is based solely on the 38 suits he wore in "Around the World in 80 Days."

This kind of frugality could more easily be accredited to a poverty-stricken actor, or one known for his tightness with a dollar. David is neither. One of movieland's richest men and one-third owner of the highly successful Four Star Television Company, he drives a Bentley, has servant-staffed mansions in Palm Springs, Calif., St. Jean on the French Riviera, and in Château d'Oex, Switzerland. He spends money on parties and presents as if he printed it.

Yet the Italian incident shows why David is considered filmdom's most unpredictable actor.

It is typical of the man who has starred in more than 100 films that he worries himself sick the first day he is out of work for fear that he may never get another job! It is typical, too, that when filming "Around the World in 80 Days," he was terrified by the thought of ascending in an ultrasafe balloon—but on treacherous Alpine slopes he schusses and alaloms with the most daring of skiers.

Long before he was an actor wealthy enough to indulge his eccentricities, David Niven was known as a man who could be expected to do the unexpected.

Born in Kirriemuir, Scotland, 53 years ago, Niven progressed through regular British prep schools and took the entrance examination for the Royal Navy when he was 17. According to his own recollection, "When the Navy added up my score, they suggested I try for the Army, so off I

went to Sandhurst, where I was commissioned at 19."

David's idea of discipline wasn't generally accepted in His Majesty's armed forces. There was the time in Malta when he rebelled against the heavy, regulation steel helmet by asking a London toyshop for an imitation helmet made of papier-mâché. The third time he wore it at a dress parade, a cloudburst struck and the paper hat drooped over his eyes like an uncooked pizza pie. Niven was confined to quarters for one week.

He was 25 when he quit the service, and the Army was not upset. With the first shot of World War II, however, Niven left a promising Hollywood career to return to Britain and fight for home and country. "As a British subject, I felt it was the thing to do," he said simply.

It is also typical of the man who didn't like military discipline to volunteer for the Phantom Commandos, who were charged with some of the most dangerous raids on continental Europe long before D-Day. He also rose from second lieutenant to lieutenant colonel.

There are various romantic accounts on how he came to the United States in the first place. Here's Niven's simple, unvarnished version: "The truth is that I met Barbara Hutton at a party in London, and she asked me to visit her in New York if I ever had time. I decided to take the time."

**D**AVID ARRIVED in the United States in the 1930s and moved into the Waldorf-Astoria, where the price of the room quickly exhausted his funds. He didn't have enough cash to take care of a laundry bill but worked it out in typical Niven fashion—by borrowing a Rolls-Royce from a friend and using it to deliver bundles of Chinese laundry door-to-door until his debt was paid.

Subsequently, he accepted an invitation to visit some friends in Santa Barbara, Calif., where he met some English Navy officers on a goodwill tour of Pacific coast ports. They invited him to a party on board *H.M.S. Norfolk*. The party got somewhat out of hand, and David found himself at sea at 4 in the morning. As a gag, British sailors put David aboard the *Bounty*—the one MGM had built for

At 53, Niven is still a bon vivant. At left, he amuses his wife Hjordia with clowning. At right, he skis with his older son David.

