Bochco signs deal with CBS

Three-series, four-year pact kicks in in 1987

By Steve McClellan

Veteran television producer Steven Bochco has formed a new three-series, four-year, exclusive program alliance with CBS, effective in 1997.

In a teleconference last week, Bochco and CBS Entertainment President Peter Tortorici said it was likely Bochco would produce one or more shows for CBS this year or next, before the venture kicks in.

Those shows would involve projects offered to and passed on by ABC. Bochco’s deal with ABC started in 1988 and still has three series and almost two years to go. But a year ago, the ABC deal converted from an exclusive setup to a first-look basis.

Bochco can immediately shop all projects on which ABC passes.

Bochco’s next show for ABC, the legal drama Murder One, is in development for the 1995-96 season.

Bochco’s program distribution arrangement with Fox (including use of the Fox lot to produce his shows), sunsets with the expiration of the ABC deal. Fox would continue to distribute and syndicate the Bochco programs originally produced for ABC.

It’s likely that CBS will serve as distributor of the shows Bochco produces for the network, since the two sides will share equally in after-market revenue.

The ABC-Bochco alliance has produced memorable, if not always successful, programs. NYPD Blue is perhaps the biggest hit to have come from the alliance.

Doogie Howser, which debuted in 1989, was a more modest hit that lasted four seasons. But other shows from the ABC alliance never caught on, including the oddball Cop Rock, a police drama/musical.

Civil Wars, a legal drama based in New York, struggled for two seasons before being canceled. Capitol Critters, a half-hour animated political parody, lasted only a few episodes.

Bochco told reporters that he had discussions with ABC last year about extending his deal there. Asked why those talks broke off, Bochco said a number of factors were involved, “not the least of which have to do with their current successes.”

Asked to elaborate, Bochco said that because ABC’s programing needs are currently not as great, the network would not benefit as much from extending the alliance—at least for the kind of return that Bochco was looking for. But at CBS, the timing and the need are “absolutely right.”

CBS has dropped from first to third in the prime time ratings.