

Is *Bosch* is the Best Procedural Drama Ever?

By Steve Sternberg

As a result of so many programs on so many platforms, and the fact that everybody doesn't have access to everything anymore, television viewing has become much more splintered than even just a few years ago. So, it is possible, even likely, that any list of "best" TV shows will have several that many readers have not seen, or perhaps even heard of.

If you are among those who have not yet discovered *Bosch*, you are missing out on one of the very best series on any platform. The seventh season dropped this June, and there are now 68 episodes that you can binge at your leisure. If you don't subscribe to Prime Video, it is worth it just so you can watch this great series (you can always drop your subscription afterward if you can't find something else that strikes your fancy).

I've included *Bosch* several times in my annual list of my favorite TV shows. There's a reason it's Prime Video's longest running scripted series. There are some spoilers below.

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Bosch is not only the best procedural drama currently on television, it might be the best procedural drama ever on television – and one of the best police series of any genre. Titus Welliver is perfection as the brooding, smart, tough as nails, flawed, and haunted detective Hieronymus “Harry” Bosch. He’s been brilliant in many supporting roles over the years, and it’s great to see him in the lead. He melts into the role (as he does with virtually everything he touches).

Harry Bosch is a Los Angeles homicide detective, first introduced in Michael Connelly’s 1992 crime novel, *The Black Echo* (there were 21 subsequent *Bosch* books). On paper, he’s the type of character that you might think is just another hard-boiled detective throwback. In the hands of Titus Welliver, however, he’s one of the most compelling and watchable characters on television.

The jazz-loving Bosch is a sea of calm in a world filled with chaos, a renegade who believes in following procedure. He’s a legend among his peers (and his superiors), a nuisance to the higher-ups who often see him as a rogue “cowboy,” and a threat to any corrupt cops or politicians in his orbit.

Bosch’s theme song, *Can’t Let Go* (by Caught a Ghost) is pitch perfect. When an innocent civilian is killed on his watch, he can become a relentless avenger, bucking authority at every turn as he seeks justice, even at the risk of his own career. He knows the system is skewed against people without power or connections, and he sees himself as one of the few who might be able to even the odds. When he rolls up his sleeves to provide a glimpse of his tattoos, you know there’s than meets the eye to the former special forces officer, who served in both the first Gulf War and Afghanistan.



One of my favorite Bosch quotes sums up the inner conflict going on not only in him, but in many of the main characters – **“Everyone has two dogs fighting inside. The one you choose to feed is the one who wins.”** Bosch brings humanity to a job too often filled with tragedy – he has photos on his desk of young people who fell through the system, whose killers he knows will probably never be brought to justice (until he finally catches one). Bosch’s credo is **“everybody counts or nobody counts.”**

His personal life has been touched by much tragedy – his mother was murdered when he 12, and he grew up in a series of foster homes and rough juvenile facilities. Several other women in his life have either been killed, hurt, or put in serious danger (including his ex-wife, new girlfriend, and daughter).

Each season focuses on one main crime that Bosch and crew need to solve, along with one or two related (or not-so-related) crimes, with some threads and characters crossing multiple seasons. There are also a few side stories each season, focusing on Bosch’s family or colleagues.

Unlike most broadcast procedurals, which generally solve the case of the week by the end of each episode, *Bosch* takes a full 10-episode season (or more) to solve the central crime – showing the frustration along the way as the investigations undergo numerous stops and starts. It involves focusing on the everyday routine police work that the show somehow manages to continually make interesting. Also unlike broadcast procedurals, which typically air more than 20 episodes per season, *Bosch*, with less than half as many episodes, is not weighed down by unnecessary filler. Every episode is tight, straightforward, and unhurried as the detectives gradually unravel clues to solve each crime. The side plots never slow down the season’s main storyline – a testament to the wonderful supporting actors, who are strong enough to carry the show when Bosch is off screen.

Something happens in season 7 that rattles even the sturdy, steady, and usually unflappable Bosch, and drives him to cross a professional line he may not be able to come back from. But it sets the stage perfectly for the already announced spin-off series slated for IMDb TV (Amazon's free ad-supported streaming app). No release date has been announced, but filming is underway.

The ensemble cast of regulars are spot on for their respective roles. The show's guest stars have been a string of superb character actors who you will immediately recognize (if you're over 40) and wonder where you've seen them before.

Here's a brief rundown of the major players in Bosch's world.



Harry's relationship with his **daughter Maddie** (elegantly played by Madison Lintz) is one of the driving forces of the show. Maddie grows into a dynamic presence of her own throughout *Bosch's* seven seasons. She starts out as a precocious 16-year-old living in Las Vegas with her former FBI agent mother (now a professional poker player). After a major tragedy strikes, she moves in with Bosch. She takes a job as an intern in the District Attorney's office, eventually moving on to intern for Bosch's sometime nemesis, high-profile defense attorney, Honey Chandler (Mimi Rogers) – which Bosch is none-too-pleased about. He does not like the idea of his daughter potentially defending criminals he captures.

Maddie has grown up to be savvy, level-headed, fiercely independent, and sometimes as intense as her father. The series smartly avoids any of the typical tropes of the rebellious teenage daughter – she might not always agree with her parents, but she does respect them. After being exposed to terrorist violence, she rethinks her goals and decides she wants to become a prosecutor. She tells her father “maybe someday you can hook ‘em and I can cook ‘em.” But she plans to keep working for Honey Chandler because “a good prosecutor should know how to think like a defense attorney.”

She has seen the toll the job and all that comes with it has taken on Bosch (and those he loves), but she's still her father's daughter. Eventually she decides that protecting the victims is better than prosecuting the bad guys, and she fills out a police department application, planning to follow in his footsteps. Maddie will play a key role in the upcoming *Bosch* spin-off.



Jamie Hector portrays Bosch's Haitian-American **partner, Detective Jerry Edgar** (nicknamed J. Edgar). He might be best known for playing drug kingpin Marlo Stanfield on HBO's *The Wire*. Here he's a stylish (always wears a classic suit and tie), straight-laced, by-the-book detective who is often put off by Harry's tendency to go rogue in his pursuit of justice. There's an interesting combination of respect and tension between the two excellent but very different detectives.

J Edgar is sometimes deeply affected by decisions he has to make on the job – such as when he shoots and kills a Haitian drug kingpin and war criminal who was under government protection as a CIA asset. Despite being cleared of any wrongdoing, he struggles with not being sure if it was really a “good” shoot or if he did it solely for revenge (the man had murdered J. Edgar's uncle). It causes him to temporarily unravel, affecting both his personal and professional life. It also causes a rift between him and Harry, compromising some cases and endangering people close to them. Harry manages to give him a wake-up call and seemingly snap him out of his funk. J. Edgar pulls himself together and helps save the day when hit men go after Bosch and his daughter. As always, he has Bosch's back when he needs him most. While he won't be a regular on the *Bosch* spin-off, he might make an appearance down the road.



Lance Reddick flawlessly walks the line between righteousness and corruptness as **Chief of Police Irvin Irving**. You root for him when he is fighting corrupt politicians, but when Bosch calls him out for being corrupted himself, you root against him. It's not easy portraying such a nuanced character who at times seems noble but at other times seems compromised.

You're never sure how he really feels about Bosch (and vice versa) – he sees him as a nuisance, but also respects his abilities and instincts, and knows he will always do the right thing (he almost seems relieved when he does). They develop a tenuous friendship, or rather, alliance, based on mutual need and common foes. They respect but distrust each other. It's Chief Irving's actions in season 7, which Bosch sees as a betrayal, that might be what pushes him toward a new direction. The Chief could easily have some role in the spin-off, although nothing has been announced.



Amy Aquino is excellent as **Lieutenant Grace Billets**, Bosch's immediate **supervisor**. As a lesbian, she faces not just sexism, but homophobia and social media harassment as well. She's had numerous confrontations with dismissive male colleagues and bosses, and usually winds up on top. She's a Bosch ally, who thinks he is too often a loose cannon, and gives him cover when necessary. They have an immense amount of respect for one another.

One of the side stories in season 7 involves the harassment she faces by two misogynist cops under her command. Her Captain dismisses her complaints and takes their side. The series handles this situation more expertly than a lot of other shows would, as she agonizes about how to respond to institutional sexism and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination. The show highlights the various ways this

impacts not just her, but other female (and male) officers as well. You so want her to fight back, that when she finally goes after them and they get their comeuppance, it's very satisfying.



Gregory Scott Cummins and Troy Evans are **fellow old-school detectives** Johnson and Moore, affectionately known as **Crate and Barrel**. They provide some of the shows comic relief, but they know what they're doing and Bosch respects the hell out of them. They may be seasoned and nearing retirement age, but they're solid, down-to-earth detectives whose experience and insights are invaluable.

While Bosch and J. Edgar track down major criminals and terrorists, Crate and Barrel usually work the more pedestrian crimes. But their hard work behind the scenes and away from the action often helps Bosch solve a big case. In one scene where several characters are mired in office politics, someone asks Barrel what's going on, and his reply, "the usual treason and fuckery," is one of my favorite lines.



Mimi Rogers is **high-powered trial attorney Honey Chandler**, who has a reputation for going after police officers. She initially clashes with Bosch when he's accused of killing an unarmed suspect, and then winds up defending him when he is accused of planting evidence. She eventually becomes an ally (if not outright friend). She's one of the guest stars that crosses over several seasons.

In the first season she handles the case of a serial killer's wife who accuses Bosch of wrongful death in a civil suit, where she brings out the fact that Bosch's mother was a prostitute who had been murdered when he was a boy, and accused him of killing an innocent man for revenge. In season 2, she gets an acquittal for a guilty defendant Bosch had arrested. In season 4, a court appoints her as

a special master on a case Bosch is working, where she winds up helping him. In season 5, she represents Bosch when he is accused of planting evidence in a 20-year-old case. In season 7, Bosch's daughter Maddie is interning for Chandler. Honey is defending a drug dealer who is about to make a deal to catch much bigger fish. But he is killed by a masked gunman, who shoots Honey Chandler as well (she survives, after spending much of the season in a coma). She's signed on for the spin-off.



Sarah Clarke portrays Bosch's **ex-wife** and Maddie's mom, **Eleanor Wish**. She is a former FBI profiler turned professional poker player. She had been forced out of the FBI several years ago because she broke the law while investigating a case. To earn her way back into the FBI, she agrees to go undercover to infiltrate a Chinese triad gambling ring. In season 4, as she is walking to her car after meeting Harry for coffee to discuss their failed marriage and their daughter, she is attacked by two assassins on motorcycles.



Scott Klace plays **Sgt. John Mankiewicz**, the **watch commander** at the LAPD's Hollywood Division. He knows pretty much everything that goes on at the station – and what he doesn't know he can find out. He's unobtrusive, has a dry sense of humor, and often provides commentary on the chaos going on around him. He is friendly with Harry, and often acts as a confidante to Lieutenant Grace Billets.