

News for aliens

THE AMERICAN Broadcasting Company has figured out a way to raise ratings for its news specials — produce one for a potentially vast new audience in outer space.

No kidding. *The Koppel Report: News from Earth*, broadcast by ABC over Christmas, is a review by earthlings for any alien intelligence out there that might tune in, demographics unknown.

It might seem a silly notion, but it is an often enlightening and occasionally amusing hour of self-examination that (who knows?) might be the first inter-planetary newsmagazine as television signals travel into space at nearly 300,000km per second.

“The thought may fascinate or horrify you,” Koppel said, in an aside to fellow earthlings. “But what if someday, a thousand light-years from now, some alien intelligence decoded the signal?”

In case they do, Koppel and guests addressed themselves to extraterrestrial viewers: “So what do we tell you, out there in the far reaches of space, about us and our planet? Well, for one thing, by the time you see this we’ll all be long dead,” Koppel informed them cheerily.

“During this year just past, we took detailed note of a great many things that were so important to us, and must seem so irrelevant to you.”

But if our next-solar-system neighbours pick up *News from Earth*, they will hear, among others, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop on AIDS, environmentalist Jean-Michel Cousteau on

pollution, fast-talking comedian John Moschitta on stress, Billy Graham on God and Vladimir Pozner on no-god.

GOD and VIACHIMIR POZNER ON NO-GOD.

The only prominent women on the program were the United Nations representative from Barbados, Dame Nita Barrow, and anthropologist Jane Goodall, who discussed endangered species.

A message to aliens: the sexual balance of the program notwithstanding, females are not on the endangered list.

Even if some did act silly: "If there's anybody out there," one giggled. "Come get me."

Koppel and company covered just about everything. The only apparent oversight was not taking the opportunity to issue an invitation to the Miss Universe pageant.

Half-way through the program, Koppel gave an update on those travellin' TV signals, which, he estimated were "well past Mars, a mere five minutes from Jupiter and half-way to Saturn."

"We think about you all the time," Koppel told outer-space audiences, introducing a segment on earthly fascination with UFO's illustrated with clips of sci-fi movies, from *War of the Worlds* to *ET*.

But Koppel did not warn our neighbours light-years away that if they did receive *News from Earth*, they might soon be subjected to strange and uncontrollable forces from our planet — ratings services looking to wire them up.

— The Associated Press