Nero Wolfe: The Complete First Season
3 vols. 10 hrs. DVD ISBN 0-7670-5499-7. $59.95

Nero Wolfe: The Complete Second Season
ea. vol: color. A&E Television Networks, 800-423-1212;ShopAETV.com. 2004

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A&E's tragically short-lived detective series makes its much-welcomed DVD debut. The First Season boxed set offers The Doorbell Rang, Champagne for One, Prisoner's Base 1 & 2, Eeny Meeny Murder Moe, Disguise for Murder, Door to Death, Christmas Party, and Over My Dead Body. The Second Season features Death of a Doxy, Murder Is Corny, Too Many Clients, and Cop Killer, plus extras, including The Golden Spiders, a two-hour feature that aired before the show was officially scheduled, a "Making of" featurette, and an especially nice bonus program, The Silent Speaker, presented in letterbox. The production quality here is top shelf, and every element, from the cars and wardrobe to jazzy soundtrack and locations, is dead on. The scripts have been carefully and faithfully adapted to retain the all-important atmosphere of Rex Stout's original works. What really makes the series superior, however, is the ensemble cast led by Maury Chaykin as Wolfe; Timothy Hutton as Wolfe's right hand, Archie Goodwin; Colin Fox and butler/chef Fritz; and Bill Smitrovich as the bull-necked cigar-chomping Inspector Cramer. There is especially strong chemistry between Hutton and Chaykin, who epitomizes the rotund, beer-swilling sleuth with appropriate magisterial indignation and eccentricity. Hutton thoroughly embodies tough lady-killer Goodwin. A&E's Nero Wolfe is so good, it's criminal. Highly recommended.