



LETHAL WEAPON IN THE SPOTLIGHT

CAR BOMB

CHANNEL 4, 7PM

An interesting one this, and not just for the rather brave fact that C4's putting it out at sleepy-time, sunny Sunday evening when most brains want to recoil from hard thought. It succeeds, and is ultimately fascinating, but perhaps not for the precise reasons intended.

Ostensibly, it's a history of the eponymous terror weapon – how the car bomb was invented, tweaked, inherited, forgotten, revived. Its incredible, poisonous, simplicity, and the concomitant nightmare complexities of countering it. This history it tackles comprehensively, if a little simplistically.

Presenter Bob Baer (above), a former CIA spy in Lebanon – 'I loved Beirut. The women, the rush; it was a great place to be a spy' – is sadly allowed too little similar personal input. The script has him having to Hollywood cliff-hang far too often, with clunking lines such as 'Murder wasn't new. What was new was the car bomb,' or 'You can even use it for business! If your business

is controlling the world's heroin supply...'

But, Baer and his team have succeeded rather marvellously in tracking down eyewitnesses, ageing terrorists, limbless bomb-disposalists, teary old Mafiosi and wrinkled student anarchists, and getting them to speak. It is absorbing to hear them, late in their long lives – the first car bomb went off in 1920, in Wall Street; the weapon has been with us almost as long as the car – attempt to justify what our weasel words now call collateral damage. The taking of innocent lives, and the fluid lies which still attempt to pass this off as regrettable rather than, of course, inevitable.

From old newsreels of the burgeoning Israeli conflict, and of the citrus beauty and black secrets of Palermo's hotels in 1957, right through to Irishmen managing to blow themselves up in Allegros stuffed with lashed-up petards of farm-stump dynamite, and way beyond, it's actually just a terribly good history lesson, if you can ignore the tenuousness of the linking theme, and in the end a brave and beguiling hour.

Euan Ferguson