

Max's beautiful nightmare

The 1979 Miss Universe contest was memorable — especially for Max Bostock.



The words Miss Universe are never far from Max Bostock's mind. You know the story. Just as the winner of the 1979 event was announced and photographers rushed forward to capture her joy, the stage at the Perth Entertainment Centre collapsed. There were chaotic scenes and pictures soon flashed around the world.

Oops. Perth was on the world stage in a way that no one, and especially Mr Bostock, would have wanted. But that happened in the final minutes — the event itself was an enormous achievement, on a grand scale.

Mr Bostock remembers it as his biggest challenge. It began in 1977 when the State Government was looking for ways to celebrate WA's 150th anniversary. Because the winners of the national Miss Beach Girl contest went on to represent Australia in the Miss Universe contest, he was a franchise holder.

"At first, the cost of flying and accommodating about 90 contestants, 50 staff and equipment from all over the world seemed prohibitive," he said. But with help from sponsors when they realised that the show would reach 500,000 people worldwide, he was given the go-ahead to come up with a budget. A preliminary contract was signed a year later, with Qantas flying contestants from around the world and crew from the UK and the US.

Twenty contestants were involved in the collapse of the stage. Three were bruised and two had leg injuries, fortunately not serious. The winner, for the record, was Miss Venezuela, Maritza Sayalero.



But there is a story less well known about the event, concerning the American NBC organisation which, it emerged in pre-recording the opening segments, had reneged on its deal to provide a 90-second promotion for Qantas, instead using one of just 30 seconds. They would not budge.

"At this point I took what was probably the most dangerous decision of my career. I instructed the Entertainment Centre staff to turn out the lights. TV stations around the world would have lost millions of dollars in advertising revenue if the show was not broadcast.

"NBC representatives told me they would take legal action and I would never work in television again if I didn't turn the lights on again.

"It was only after they relented and remade the promo to the agreed 90 seconds, and we saw it in the can, that I gave the OK to turn the lights on again.

"To this day I doubt whether senior TVW management knew of this near-disaster. I must have been forgiven for my 'lights out' episode because I was invited to South Korea the following year to be a judge for the 1980 Miss Universe Pageant."