Photo-magazines get a new LIFE

By Bob Wasserman

"Life is back," proclaims the first page of the October 1978 issue of the revived Time-Life, Inc. publication, and indeed it is, complete with all the color photography and an excerpt from Mario Puzo's new novel, "Fool's Gold. Life is making a comeback since it ceased regular publications in 1972, and from all indications, it will probably be around for a while.

Life's demise earlier in this decade is attributable to several events. First, the growing pace of television took much of the impact of photo-magazines and placed this power in the hands of television's immediate coverage. Life makes a stab at TV in its assessment of the modern realization of the 1970's: "Bombarded daily by television pictures bounced off satellites... it is a sophisticated audience, hard to surprise. How do we then lure Life-readers, and that is the biggest question which confronts the revitalized magazine?

This brings us to readership, advertising, and money. Many of Life's advertisers switched to television spots in the 60's and 70's, following the attraction of the nation's consumers. Life seems to have found a good number of new advertisers for their first issue, including car manufacturers, cosmetics companies, scotch distributors, and even McDonald's. These advertisers take advantage of Life's large page-size and glossy print for effective and attractive ads. Life's new motto is undoubtedly the "Power of the Picture," and the magazine is booming with them. Financially, though, one has to wonder about the number of photos. One of the biggest problems facing photo-magazines is the cost of the high-quality paper needed to print pictures, and Life's newstand price is only $1.50. In comparison, Time sells for $1.00 and Sports Illustrated for $1.25. Life has arrived at this price through several compromises, including using only freelance photographers, but a rate like this may be coming at the first signs of the revival.

The best pieces in this first issue are two photo-essays. The cover story on bullfighting is good, if not spectacular, and should be a popular feature after the Atlantic crossing of the American balloon this summer. The story on ballooning is good, if not spectacular, and should be a popular feature.

The article on the Shiah of Iran's summer vacation without lending support for the revived Time-Life, Inc. publication, and indeed it is, complete with all the color photography and an excerpt from Mario Puzo's new novel, "Fool's Gold. Life is making a comeback since it ceased regular publications in 1972, and from all indications, it will probably be around for a while. Financially, though, one has to question the profitability of the magazine.