



Left to right—"The New Avengers"—Gareth Hunt, Joanna Lumley and Patrick Macnee.

'When I have to kick down a door the hinges aren't screwed to the frame'

GARETH HUNT sat on the steps of a country mansion. Every now and again his right hand darted inside his unbuttoned jacket to emerge holding a .38 Smith and Wesson revolver.

He looked up at me watching him and smiled, writes Rex King.

"I'd never make an undercover man in real life. No matter how much I practise," he said wryly, "the gun keeps getting stuck in its holster!"

But there's little danger of Gareth getting bumped off yet. Not with more episodes of "The New Avengers" still to be made.

For he's portraying John Steed's tough new side kick, Mike Gambit. And without Mike around, Steed wouldn't be likely to live long either.

Blue eyes

For the record, Gareth is six feet tall, weighs 12½ stone and has friendly blue eyes. His hair is brown and crinkly—and he looks very physical.

And if viewers think his handsome face is familiar, they're right.

He was featured as an ambitious footman in the Bellamy household in the

highly successful "Upstairs, Downstairs" series.

Women viewers go for Gareth in a big way. They love his tough, all-male approach to dangerous problems.

"But I'm really not that type of man," he confided. "The idea of me living the life of Mike Gambit is ludicrous.

"Oh, I have ideas about keeping fit, but basically I'm too lazy to do much about it.

"I certainly don't leap out of a warm bed in the early morning and jog around the block. And I'm pleased to say life is made easy for me on the 'Avengers' set.

"When I've to kick down a door the hinges aren't screwed to the frame and any wooden bar that's put across the other side of the door as a 'barricade' is sawn almost through!"

High score

But take that "shrinking violet" approach with a pinch of salt. At 32, Gareth is powerfully built and admits he enjoys fight scenes.

For the series, he went through a toughening-up session at a commando training school, scoring high points over an assault course.

★ Romance for Steed?

NEXT month, filming begins on a new series of ITV's "The New Avengers," with Patrick Macnee, Joanna Lumley and Gareth Hunt. The whisper is that there's to be more than a hint of romance between Purdey and Steed in the new series.

EXPLOSION THREW TO THE GROUND

Continued from previous page

But on weapon training, he came in for a few surprises.

"I am not used to guns and when I was shown how to use a Smith and Wesson pistol," he told me, "I was startled that the gun kicked so much when I fired it."

"So much so that after the instructor had watched me grab at the gun in the shoulder holster I was wearing and fire at the target, he commented I should load it with five bullets instead of six. Then if I grabbed the trigger by mistake as I made a draw, I wouldn't shoot myself under the arm!"

And in an area of the training where he thought he would shine, he was humiliated by failure.

Confused

"I didn't think that driving would give me any great difficulty," Gareth said. "But when the instructor told me to spin a Jaguar saloon on a skid pan, I soon found out just how much I didn't know!"

"After half an hour of 'blood, sweat and tears,' I began to get the hang of it, but I still couldn't bring off a two and a half spin to order.

"I found myself getting confused and going in the wrong direction at the wrong time.

"I could never hope to match those fellers. They can do anything with their cars except make them talk."

And he fared little better on a motor-cycle.

He hadn't been on a machine for years. Yet he was being asked to slide it round corners at 50 m.p.h.

"It was the type of situation where you get a tight feeling in the pit of your stomach," Gareth told me. "You try to do what you've been told, but all the time you're tense and anxious, conscious that at any moment you could smash yourself to pieces."

Great roar

"At one point I went out of control and almost slid into a fence," he told me. "Luckily a belt of bushes cushioned the fall and I was none the worse except for a shaking."

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the series that showed a training session for agents. During this a police box was to be blown up.

"We were told the amount of explosive had been carefully worked out. The box would be knocked over and make a healthy cloud of smoke—no more," said Gareth.

"But I'm afraid the explosives man had been a little over-enthusiastic.

"The police box went up with a great roar and smoke covered everything. I was blown off my feet by the blast!"

School fun

"When I got up again, the others were laughing. I borrowed a mirror from the make-up girl and saw I had a blackened face and my hair was full of tiny pieces of blue paint which had previously been on the police box!"

Gareth is a Londoner, born at Battersea, and later lived at Mitcham in Surrey.

He's an only child and his father was killed in the war. His mother brought him up single-handed until he was six. Then she remarried.

"At school I wasn't a very good pupil," he told me. "At maths I was atrocious, and my spelling was even worse. However, I did like English classes, especially if it meant I could make up stories. I'd also had a great deal of fun while doing games and science.

"One time, I discovered that my activities could quite easily have blown up the whole science lab... a fact that gave me a lot of schoolboyish pleasure at the time.

Navy days

"But I've now mellowed towards authority! I've been back to see my old teachers several times.

"The last time was when the school was practising for a carol concert at Christmas. I must say I really enjoyed going back. You see school then in a totally different perspective than when a schoolboy."

Acting in plays at his school whetted Gareth's appetite for the stage and when he left he had ideas of following this up, despite one teacher's recommendation that, because he was tall, he should be a policeman.

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Gareth Hunt

TV SCENE WAS TOO

REAL FOR COMFORT

I was travelling round the world.

"It was a smashing life. I stayed for six years. But by then I felt I needed to put down some roots.

"So, on one voyage I decided to leave the ship at Napier, New Zealand. A couple of others came with me.

"At the dockyard we caught a cab and took the longest taxi ride in our lives—100 miles. The fare was £11 and two wrist watches!"

For several months, Gareth did odd jobs in New Zealand, quickly learning to fend for himself. On one occasion only quick wits and a slice of luck got him out

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"It was the best piece of acting in my life, for once there I sprinted off down the road at top speed."

Later Gareth returned by ship to Britain.

Thereafter came various jobs—digging roads, door-to-door selling and such like.

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Bar fight

"I was in a bar minding my own business, when a labourer challenged me to a fight. I gather he didn't like the British," said Gareth.

"He was big, aggressive and drunk. I could see I was going to get the rough end of the deal.

"His pals had surrounded me, so I couldn't run, but luckily my head was clear. As he lumbered up to me and took an almighty swing, I ducked, skipped out of the way and tripped him up.

"He staggered forward and fell, smacking his head against a table and went out cold.

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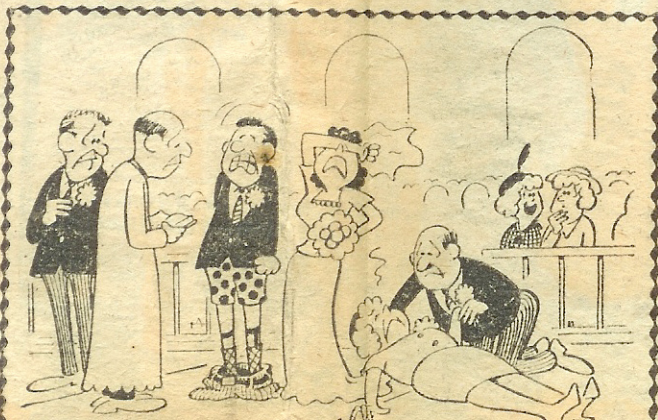
Since then he has appeared in several top-class theatre productions as well as on TV.

But he still can't get over being picked for the role of Mike Gambit in "The New Avengers." He wasn't even in acting when the last "Avengers" was made.

In disguise

But it was while playing the footman in "Upstairs, Downstairs" that he was spotted and invited to audition for the part.

Already his appearances as Mike mean that when he goes to buy his weekly newspaper, he is



"In years to come they'll probably look back on this and laugh!"

GARETH

requests for his autograph.

So much so that when he is in a hurry, he always goes in disguise, otherwise a trip that should take about fifteen minutes could be stretched into three hours . . . and that gets a bit difficult when you have appointments to keep.

"I don't adopt the 'dark glasses ploy,'" said Gareth. "I usually just wear scruffy jeans, a casual shirt and a soft cap. And I haven't been challenged while in my disguise yet.

"There are hundreds of people going around looking like that and I've found from experience that merging with the crowd is the best way to avoid being spotted."

Much of Gareth's fan mail is from women with romantic ideas. Two dozen have actually proposed.

Modern home

"All these letters are very flattering," he said "But it's more than I dare do to get involved with any of the 'customers.' And in any case, when it comes to the crunch, I'll do my own choosing. I'm chauvinist enough to insist on that."

Gareth is very wary of talking about affairs of the heart at all. Only to say that he was married once when too young, and that he has a young son he sees most week-ends.

His home is a Victorian house at Putney, London. He bought it just over a year ago when it was in a tumble-down state, and has since been hard at work renovating it. He has completely redecorated every room himself.

"I found the woodwork lessons I had at school very useful," he told me. "Using that knowledge I was able to rip out the old mantelpieces round the fires and make new, modern ones."

Archery

When he's not busy at do-it-yourself jobs around the house—or acting—Gareth gets away to the country to practise archery.

His interest started when he had to fire a bow and arrow for a theatrical production. To get it right he had expert tuition and decided to follow the sport himself.

Now he has a hunting bow and at week-ends often takes part in shooting practise in woodlands.

"It's great fun," he told me. "Animal targets are placed among the trees and the type of hits you make score points. It has practically all the fun of a real stalking session.

"Much more fun than these Smith and Wesson pistols. I can hit things with my arrows — with these revolvers I'm a dead loss."

NEXT WEEK

Patrick Macnee. Until he grew too tall he expected to be a jockey.