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Steed (ALIAS PATRICK) on killer ladies in his li



PICTURE BY MICHAEL STROUD
Patrick Macnee: gallant

WHEN "The New Avengers" flashed back on the telly-screen, after a seven year break, I didn't expect much voltage from Patrick Macnee. As John Steed, in the 'sixties, he'd ridden through women's dreams. But in the 'seventies, and at 56, I dreaded a wilt in his carnation and a batter in his bowler. Not to say a sharper crease in his face than in his pants, or worse, plastic surgery.

ITV took out insurance against any acts of God on Mr Macnee's appearance by billing him as a sort of "Uncle Steed" to his tall, dark, new side-kick, Gambit.

They'd no need. It's Steed who still switches on every woman over 13, and who, incidentally, too often makes Gambit look as if he needs a good gambit to eke out his acting.

Sixteen years, four Avenger girls and 150 episodes later, there isn't a scratch on John Steed's polish.

On screen, he is still as sharp as his lapels, and still looks as potent as his furred umbrella.

Off, Macnee is modest, with manners which sound as if they've just been gone over with a duster.

Exiled in Palm Springs, not so much by tax as by the now improving asthma of his 27-year-old daughter Jenny, his instant reaction to a NEW Avengers was "Oh God, no—not me." When they twisted his Savile Row sleeve, he went into intensive training for the come-back.

He peeled off two stone by existing on raw fruit and veg—"it was hell, because when I'm tense—and I was—worry makes me eat on pounds and pounds. Henry Kissinger used to do the same every time he had a world crisis."

He totally corked the Scotch bottle—"that didn't upset me too much, except that I'd never noticed before how boring your drinking pals can be when you're sober."

"You start a lovely dinner party, and—bang—by the time you've unfolded your



napkin, half your chums are smashed, and telling you the same thing four times. Only now you can actually hear it because you're not doing it yourself."

He had himself psycho-analysed off 80 cigarettes a day—"they really did convince me I was smoking myself to death to spite a woman I loathed in childhood who used to chain-smoke in my face."

"After that, I had to change my mind about psychiatrists being only for screwed-up Americans, and not for us well-organised British."

Professional to his broly tip, Macnee then trotted out the new Steed in whose mouth you dare look for, but not find, a false tooth. But, in private life, few actors spend less time brushing and greasing their image.

"I've reached the stage in life when I'm looking for a mature woman of 45 who wouldn't be critical of the way you make love, even when you can't make it," said the twice-married Macnee, whose son is 30.

"In theory, I've reached the 'dangerous years' when a chap's supposed to go after

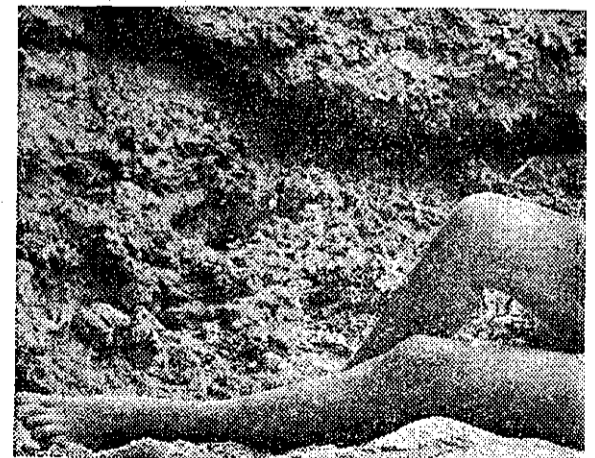
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But he Lumley, 30 new series, ashes. "If



Honor Blackman, the first Avenger girl..

AND, AS ALWAYS, THERE'S A BIZA