



Joanna Lumley with Gareth Hunt and Patrick Macnee.

THEIR REAL-LIFE STORIES IN A SPARKLING NEW SERIES

Joanna Lumley talks frankly on Page 18

STARS OF 'THE NEW AVENGERS'

JOANNA'S KICK HAD STUNTMAN IN AGONY

I WATCHED spellbound as Purdey fearlessly tackled three thugs and knocked them clean out with swift high kicks. The whole drama lasted less than two minutes and the effort didn't raise a bead of sweat on her pretty brow.

This was John Steed's new right-hand girl in action under the blazing arc lights at Pinewood Studios where "The New Avengers" is being made, writes Rex King.

She was beautiful to watch, yes, but aggressive and tough, too.

Delicious

Then the director called. "Cut," and Purdey immediately became actress Joanna Lumley—an entirely different being, as with a gossamer, feminine grace she picked her way across the studio cables and stood beside me.

"If you want a demonstration of my fighting kicks, I'll oblige," she told me sweetly with a ghost of a smile. "But I don't

encourage it. You'll never know what hit you!"

I wouldn't dream of disagreeing. For when Joanna became Purdey she is as deadly as she is blonde and delicious.

"The high-kicking technique is inspired loosely by the French fighting art of Panache," she told me. "And Purdey, an ex-ballerina, knows how to use her legs to good effect."

Perfection for the camera is achieved by the whole of the action scenes being arranged by expert stuntmen. Every movement is

carefully plotted, checked, worked out and rehearsed in slow motion like a ballet sequence.

But it didn't surprise me when she said that even these highly-controlled sequences have their risks—as one of Joanna's stuntmen found out.

Apologised

He was portraying a Russian agent and turned his body in a fight scene a split-second too late. He received a pretty, but very hard foot in the solar plexus for his lack of concentration and collapsed like a deflated balloon.

"The accident happened during an actual 'take,'" Joanna told me. "It looked marvellous on the camera. But the poor man must have been in agony for some moments, and I hurt my foot."

"As soon as the director called 'Cut,' I rushed across to see how he was. It was several seconds before he could speak. And then I apologised profusely."

MORE ON NEXT PAGE

She borrowed ladder

surprised window



Joanna at a photo call at the start of "The New Avengers."

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"But he just smiled and said it was one of the occupational hazards that he ran.

"But it made me a little nervous of the fighting scenes for some time. The idea of really hurting someone is not my idea of fun."

Stepping into the slim shoes of previous "Avenger" girls Honor Blackman, Diana Rigg and Linda Thorson, Joanna is all set to make Purdey as big a success as her predecessors' characters.

Viewers will remember that Cathy Gale, played by Honor, used to put on her kinky, black leather suit whenever she was going to have a fight. But Joanna's Purdey doesn't dress specially to "kill."

She may sometimes do a lightning strip down to a cat suit, but many of her glamorous clothes are made in panels which can easily fall apart so as not to restrict those high-kicking legs.

Now she can afford the plumber's bill

old son, James, came back loaded with groceries—and then remembered I'd left the door key on the hall table.

"I was furious with myself for being so stupid. I searched round the house to find an open window. But the only one that had been left unlatched was on the first floor.

Speechless

"I was just wondering what to do when a window cleaner came into sight at the end of the road.

"I rushed up and asked if he would be kind enough to use his ladders to climb into the window and let me in.

"He looked at me very suspiciously. Once, he said, he would have helped me like a shot, but nowadays you couldn't trust even the good-looking girls.

"How did he know I wasn't trying to break into the house and using my shopping bag and little boy as 'cover'?"

"For a moment, I was speechless with indignation. Then, to his surprise, I grabbed his ladder, put it against the wall and started to climb.

"I thought this would embarrass him into helping, but I was wrong. He just stood there watching. It was me who was embarrassed as I got to the top, wobbling nervously.

"Then I prised open the window, climbed inside and ran down the stairs to let in my son.

"By the time I'd got the front door open, the window cleaner had vanished and taken his ladder with him. So much for a gallant gentleman."

look after him when she's at work.

"Sometimes I have been lucky enough to have my mother to help out but for the most part I had to engage nannies. And not all were a success.

"But now, with the money Purdey is earning for me, I can afford the fees of a boarding prep school.

"My home is benefiting, too. I can take the dish away from the leaking pipe in the loo because I can afford the plumber's bills and get the carpenter to mend the window sashes and cords.

"Until now the windows have been propped up with empty beer cans."

Joanna's family have a tradition of living in India. Her father, now retired, was there as a major with the Gurkha Regiment.

Text books

Joanna was born in Kashmir. Later she moved with her parents, visiting Hong Kong and Malaya before being sent home to Britain when she was eight.

Her interest in acting began at 14.

Then, at a convent school in Hastings, she became an ardent fan of Christopher Lee and horror movies.

She used to sneak out of the convent to see his films in the local cinema.

But her preoccupation had no effect on her school work.

"I used to read up text books before the test and answer all the questions without any trouble at all," she said.

"Trouble was that a few weeks later I'd forgotten the lot!"

When she was 17, Joanna left school and, after a course, became a photographer's model, then a fashion model.

"The modelling business was booming and I had a fabulous time," she said, "but later the economic draught began to blow and I decided to switch to acting."

Joanna has always led a very full social life and could often be found in the lively fashionable night spots. At a party one night she was offered a small part in a film which she eagerly accepted.

Didn't last

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and Patrick Macnee.

REAL-LIFE
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Too many

At 29, Joanna is a slim and willowy 5 ft. 8 in. and slips inside the character of Purdey with ease. Yet she claims she is nothing like an "Avenger" girl in real life.

While her screen character is efficient to a point of being cold and calculating, Joanna is often disorganised, and admits to having a butterfly-type memory.

"The trouble is I think of too many things at once," she confided. "Because of that I tend to forget the ordinary things, like shopping lists or my front door key!"

"Just before I got the part of Purdey, I went out shopping with my nine-year-

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"I'd like to drown my sorrows, but she can swim!"

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Landing the role as Steed's right-hand girl could make Joanna a great deal of money.

Help out

And that is a very nice thought.

Before landing the role Joanna had been out of work for some six months and was so dis-spirited with Britain that she was thinking of leaving to look for work in America.

Now all that has changed and she is delighted that her previous problems with nannies have vanished.

As a single parent she has found that it's one thing to have a nine-year-old son at home and quite another to

engage nannies. And were a success.

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From then on, her experience expanded and she appeared in repertory companies in different parts of Britain.

Later she made a James Bond film with George Lazenby and Diana Rigg—a former John Steed girl.

In another film called "Games That Lovers Play," she met actor-writer Jeremy Lloyd and, after a whirlwind courtship, they married. But it didn't last and they are now divorced but remain very good friends.

Television viewers will perhaps best remember Joanna as Elaine Perkins, the girl who broke Ken Barlow's heart when she appeared in eight episodes of "Coronation Street" three years ago.

AVENGERS'

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lder from cleaner

She played a headmaster's daughter who brutally turned down Ken's proposal of marriage by telling him he was a bore.

There is little doubt that Joanna finds the role of Purdey most exhausting. When she returns home to London in the evenings she seldom wants to do more than cook supper, tidy up and prepare her lines for the following day.

One certain way to get some relaxation, she says, is to visit her parents, who live in the deep Kentish countryside at Rolvenden.

There, in the pretty village, she is able to

stretch her legs and walk the country lanes she has known for years.

Her parents live in a detached house with spacious grounds.

As Joanna herself puts it, "If ever I want to lose Purdey for a week-end and recharge my batteries, the village is like a haven for me."

NEXT WEEK

Gareth Hunt, to get into trim for the part of Mike Gambit in "The New Avengers," went to a commando school for a toughening-up session.