

YOU can forget Purdey, that glamorous girl Friday from "The New Avengers."

Joanna Lumley, the girl who brought Purdey to life, has sidestepped smartly on those gorgeous long legs and is orbiting into the space age.

Rest assured, she is not going bionic. But she will certainly be somebody extra-terrestrial in a new ITV series called "Sapphire and Steel," due on our screens in the next few weeks.

Joanna explains: "It's all a bit weird but, basically, Sapphire and Steel are a couple sent to get the universe out of a bit of trouble."

Why are they called Sapphire and Steel?

That's something she is still a bit vague about, but evidently sapphire and steel are friendly elements in the atomic table—minerals and metals you can trust . . .

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The particular mystery of Sapphire and Steel isn't the only one Joanna has been trying to solve recently.

Indeed, she is likely to be found "in a thoroughly bad temper" with bits of a carpet sweeper strewn across the living-room floor of her London home.

She declares: "I do not intend to get anyone to mend it. I shall repair it myself, or throw the blasted thing away."

"I could quite easily give it a Purdey chop, but call in a man I won't."

It's all part of the "Lib Lumley" image, the determination to be responsible to absolutely no one.

Yet the girl who keeps a copy of Richmal Crompton's "Just William" by her bed along with "The Book of Common Prayer" could not have come from a more conventional background.

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Born in Kashmir, she is the daughter of a retired major in the Gurkhas who fought the war in Burma. She was brought up in a succession of Far Eastern

An Avenger goes into orbit . . .

By JUDITH REGAN

British Army bungalows before her parents eventually posted her back to Britain to attend a convent on the south coast.

The conventionality ended at 21 when she became an unmarried mother and James Lumley was born. She has never revealed the name of the father.

At mention of James, the flippancy goes and she readily admits to being "thoroughly sloppy" about her son.

She says: "Friends are always asking me to reveal the father. But I won't. I've got a sense of fair play. You can't suddenly start bawling 'If you don't buy the shoes I'll tell.'"

"That would be rotten. I may be a bit dizzy and hopeless, but I've a few principles."

She goes on: "Don't think it was easy then, being an only parent. I had to work. I felt so wretched when James turned on me and said: 'Don't go out tonight, mummy.'"

"But I needed the £45 a week I was getting in the West End as a model."

Those days have passed. "The New Avengers" made Joanna famous and rather better off. "Money has always been important because I have a son to support," she says.

"But modelling, which people think of as glamorous, was in fact desperately insecure and worrying."

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At the end of the Sixties, Joanna did a couple of films which were never shown and which she prefers to forget. "Then came a simply disastrous sex comedy which I honestly should never have done."

She admits her career prospects at that time were at such a low ebb that her agent did not think it worthwhile trying for the part of Purdey.

She laughs: "Everyone said it was wonderful that I got it, but honestly, you

should have seen some of the other actresses who tried for it.

I often think they chose me out of sheer desperation!"

Purdey has been good to her, enabling her to pay off her overdraft and move her son to a fee-paying school.

All this came in the wake of a very brief marriage and a succession of boyfriends, notably actor Michael Kitchen from whom she was always parting and having "splendid reconciliations."

Poised, mysterious women like Purdey and Sapphire don't reflect much of the real Joanna Lumley.

"They are supposed to be so self-sufficient. But me, I adore men, even when I think they're frightful."

"As for being poised, the truth is that I'm so accident-prone. I can't even lay kitchen lino without cutting myself!"

She adds with a glint of schoolgirl mischief: "I adore sitting at home eating baked beans. Not quite in the glamour image, is it?"



● Joanna Lumley . . . goodbye Purdey, hello Sapphire.