



JEAN ROOK

Purdey plunges in where even Charlie's Angels fear to tread

JOANNA LUMLEY has had a week to flatten a woman's spirits, and chest.

She has been told by French backers, who have pumped £4 million into "The New Avengers," that she is short on lip gloss and cleavage... that Avenger girl Purdey's clothes are "drab and dull."

And that the British ratings will soar on high only if Miss Lumley is feathered to look more like those three heavenly-faced girl cops in the U.S. series, "Charlie's Angels."

Riddled by this criticism, fesser women than Miss Lumley would have crawled into a gun barrel and died.

But Lumley is blasting back: "I don't mind anyone saying other women are prettier, and I'm the first to agree that Charlie's ladies are lovely. My son, James—he's nine—keeps telling me they're gorgeous."

"They are—all that sitting around in the Californian sunshine in open cars, with dark brown suntans that make their teeth look twice as white."

Gagged

"If you're golden all over, you don't need a diamond bracelet—you can look marvellous in an elastic band. I'd like to see an Angel, pale as a lily, crawling round a back lot in Pinewood in March."

"I don't resent the comparison, but I think it would be madness to model the Avengers on the Angels. If we copy the Americans, instead of doing our own very British thing, we've had it."

When Miss Lumley and I met yesterday on a dull, grey Pinewood back-lot they use as a TV sewer, she was being gagged, bound, and knocked out for the eighth take. This was nothing, she said, dabbing a split lip, to the two days she spent jumping 30 times into a green, slimy pond.

I should like to see Farrah Fawcett-Majors slime green. Because in my peak view—and I was the first to write that Charlie's Angels would sweep the ratings on their looks alone, although looks is all they've got—Lumley is right not to copy the American cats.

If Farrah F.M. moves, it

must take half a day to spray her "casually tumbled" golden halo back into place. And you do not kid me that, to make her look like that, Hollywood does not have a place for every split hair.

Apart from running and jumping like the bionic man, acting like the National Theatre, and moving like the Royal Ballet, Miss Lumley herself has given the world a hair-cut so popular that she is about to change her own.

"When you see girls trotting round Paris, Amsterdam, and even Johannesburg, all with mushroom heads, it's time to move on," says the originator of The Fringe on top, front, back, and sides.

It's a style which Avenger heads at first forbade her to have chopped, and now claim to have invented.

"For the next series, I'm having my mushroom layered. Hairdressers will be waiting, with open scissors, for a cut of the profits."

To nit-pick Miss Lumley, I would argue that she is too British. Her face is bare and fresh as a schoolboy's newly-scrubbed kneecap, and she has legs the length of hockey sticks, and an accent like the Most Popular Girl in the Fourth in an Enid Blyton paperback.

Elegance

Does it set back your sex appeal to be so well bred, convent-educated, and the daughter of a retired Indian army major?

Even if you have proved that appeal by being briefly married, having a son at 21 by a man you have never named, and been seen around with Patrick Lichfield and Rod Stewart, before the present romance with actor Michael Kitchen?

"It's no setback playing Purdey," she said shaking her thick, unlacquered mushroom.

"I think we need to play up the British elegance, comedy, and lightness of the Avengers. That's the typically British humour that sold Patrick (Macnee) and Diana (Rigg) to America."

The French backers are licking bloody lips for more violence. Lumley is about as naturally violent as a netball in the eye.

But Patrick Macnee, who, with Rigg, made an export fortune, and who has been the blue life-blood of the series for 13 years, agrees that more gore could be the death of them all.

Joke

"Ours is a surrealist, Grimm's fairy tale sort of terror," he says. "If we start pumping bullets into people's stomachs, we're done for. And it's a joke that the French should want more violence when the Americans are so interested in buying us because they've got the biggest ever no-no against violence. Viewers are even striking against 'Starsky and Hutch'."

Cut the violence. What of more sex? Why have we not seen more of Purdey, as the now year-old publicity shots promised, boiling over her bra and spilling out of the stockings she's supposed to wear instead of tights?

"Because it's not practical for a secret agent to spend her life with her bum hanging out of her pants, and her cleavage tumbling over a gate," says Miss Lumley, whose language, when roused, can be very outdoor and healthy.

"I'm all for an occasional flash of thigh, but how can Purdey justify constantly twitching at her undies? The French backers say they want French-looking clothes. Do they mean chic, or old-fashioned ooh-la-la?"

They mean what every man who's spent a weekend in Paris means by "French." Ooh-la-la. Can-can thrills. The clothes you never actually see in Paris, outside a tourist night club.

Worried

"That's what infuriates me," says Miss Lumley. "It's so unreal. Anyway, we've done sex now. We've beaten it to pulp. You can't go into a newsagent without seeing magazines full of naked girls."

"Sex has gone beyond titillation to the absolutely foul. There's nothing more they can show, but they try—now they're linking sex with atrocities, and shattered limbs, and wondering why kids are in such a psychological mess."

"The sex pushers tell you:

"That's what the public wants, dearie."

"I don't believe it. The public is worried sick by it. No wonder people who don't have 83 orgasms a minute, like it says in the magazines, feel inadequate and insecure."

"No wonder men are literally withering away. What can you expect when they're constantly told that they're failures, if they're not great studs who can go on half the night?"

"Do you wonder I've tried to make Purdey into something more than just wobbling boobs?"

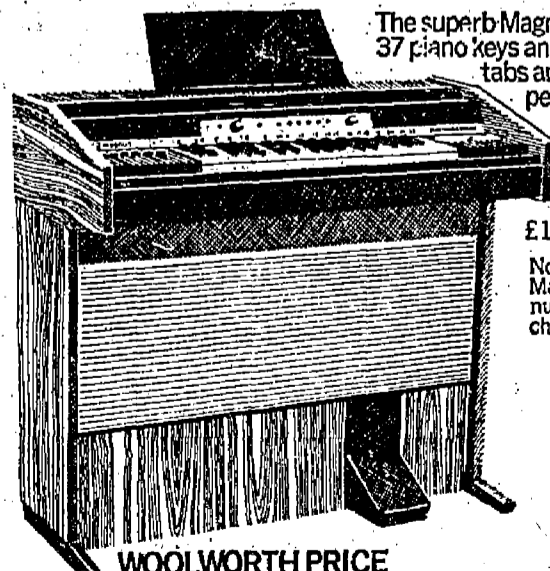
No. But I marvel that the Avenger makers can't see it. And I'd like to pit Miss Lumley against Farrah Fawcett-Majors in a straight TV fight.

Lumley would tear the wings off an Angel in the first reel.



Joanna Lumley: keeping her all-British image

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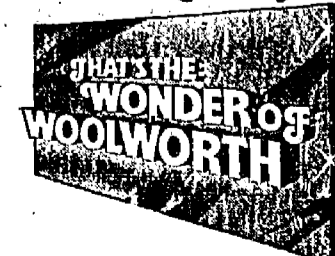
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Purdey in action... hitting out at those Angels

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