

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

OCTOBER 2006

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“I couldn’t actually see the label on The Lady’s jacket. But I didn’t need to...”

IT’S not often I can remember exactly what I wore to work on any particular day. But some days and outfits just can’t help but stick in the memory. It was this time of year about ten years ago. I was off to interview a very grand titled lady. Her husband owned about half of Yorkshire and her father owned most of the other half. We’re talking seriously posh.

The Lady herself was actually very nice and friendly and funny. As I rolled up the ancestral drive in my scruffy Toyota, she popped out from a hidden door under the grand staircase and led me in through a warren of small rooms into the huge kitchen – about the size of our house and then up into her study – approximately twice the size of our house.

But when she first saw me she hooted with laughter. Now I know I can have a strange effect on people, but outright laughter is a bit extreme.

But it was understandable and I had to smile too – because we were wearing exactly the same outfit.

That is to say both of us were wearing a fairly standard casual working uniform of black cord skirt, black boots, white silk shirt and bright red jacket.

“Snap!” said The Lady, laughing merrily.

Well yes. Or rather no. Not at all.

For a start, she was about six foot tall, a size eight and with those sort of aristocratic cheekbones that take generations of breeding and ancestral acres to achieve, while I am definitely descended from a long line of lumpen peasants, built to till the soil and earn our keep, not gaze down regally from portraits in a hall.

Then there were the clothes themselves. My skirt, shirt and jacket were all resolutely chain store. Marks & Spencer, H&M and Next, I think. H&M used to do a brilliant range of silk shirts and I’d snapped up half a dozen in different colours for next to nothing. They didn’t last very long, but they looked good while they did.

I was quite proud of my boots, which were lovely soft leather. But they had been expensive rather than extravagant. And at least skirt and boots together hid the worst of my M&S black tights, which were getting to that bobbly stage.

And until I saw her, I thought my clothes were OK, quite presentable and fitted quite well.

But the Lady’s clothes were just wonderful. The black cord skirt didn’t have a single crease or pressed bit of material. The corduroy – like the Lady herself – had a glossy sheen to it. She sat

down, stood up, and there wasn’t a crease or a crinkle or those funny shadows you get with corduroy.

The same with her shirt. No chance of that escaping from a waistband, coming untucked or a collar sticking out at a funny angle, even as she whizzed up and down library ladders trying to find a book she wanted to tell me about. Perfection.

Faced with a large part of the ancestral forests burning in a grate the size of a small garage, we abandoned our jackets. She just flung hers across the end of a sofa. The lining was a silk nearly as fine as that of her shirt. Mine showed a lot of shiny acetate and a label that said “Marks & Spencer long length”.

And don’t start me on the boots...

I couldn’t actually see the label on The Lady’s jacket. But I didn’t need to. Every bit of it – as of the shirt, skirt and boots – just glowed with quality. The standard of material, the way it was cut and stitched. It was a world – and a huge amount of money – away from what I was wearing.

Years ago I went to a clothing factory where the machinists made clothes for chain stores and for a designer diffusion range. Even though the clothes were the bargain basement end of the designer range, it still took them much longer to make than the M&S versions – more detail, more stitching, more care.

And it shows.

Which is why the craze for conspicuous labels has always seemed so odd. Those jumpers, jackets, jeans that have to have a distinctive label, tab or logo woven in so that everyone can see how much you’ve paid for your clothes.

If they need a label to tell you, if that’s the only difference between the “designer” label and the chain store product, then basically, you’ve been ripped off. You’re paying, literally, for a label, all two square inches of it. You might just as well keep the price tag on your jacket and be done with it.

Real quality, real style, speaks for itself, in the cut and quality, Even when it’s an everyday cord skirt.

The Lady was so nice and we had so much to talk about that having arrived for coffee, I stayed for lunch and was still there at tea time and instead of scuttling out down the back stairs and out through the kitchens as I had arrived, I left via the Palladian staircase.

It made me feel very grand. And at least, in our matching outfits, I almost looked the part.

Almost – but only if you didn’t look too closely.

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NE Interiors



FANGS A LOT: Dracula waits by the window to get his teeth into the guests

Spooky Towers

Kev Riley and his partner Tish had a scream decorating their seaside House of Horrors. Heart-in-mouth, RUTH CAMPBELL ventures in

I HAVE often driven past, and couldn't help but notice, the lifesize statue of Dracula that stands outside a tall, Victorian red brick guesthouse, decorated with bats and skulls and other macabre gothic symbols, at the top of a hill in Whitby.

I couldn't resist it any longer. In the tradition of all the best Hammer Horror movies, I had to have a peek inside. And I went alone. As I peered through the glass door, which is draped in a huge, black cobweb studded with vampire bats, I saw a long, dark hallway painted a sinister, blood red. And I could just about make out a coffin and a headstone.

At this point, some unsuspecting, nervous souls have been known to run away. Perhaps they thought the Bats and Broomstick adverts, promising holidaymakers a chance to Rest In Peace, referred to the tranquil, seaside setting, just up the hill from the ancient fishing port's harbour. In which case, the headstone and the coffin would come as a bit of a shock.

But what better location for a gothic guesthouse than Whitby, the town that inspired Bram Stoker's novel Dracula? This ancient harbour, shrouded in eerie sea mists, and sitting in the shadow of the imposing, skeletal abbey ruins on the hill, provided Stoker with the perfect setting for his gothic horror story.

Drawing on the real-life tale of the Demetrius shipwreck, when a cargo of unoccupied coffins drifted ashore here, Stoker had the evil Count himself shipwrecked just off Whitby. And it is in the town that he meets and kills Lucy.

As a thick sea fog engulfs the narrow, wind-

ing cobbled streets around the harbour, even today, it is easy to imagine a vampire lurking in the shadows.

When I finally pluck up the courage to grasp the skull-shaped doorknocker and bang on the Bats and Broomsticks door, landlord Kev Riley appears. He is dressed all in black with long, jet black hair, but he is disarmingly friendly and gives me a warm welcome. I must admit, I am a bit disappointed. I was expecting something a bit scarier than that.

It soon becomes clear that those brave enough to venture inside will not be disappointed. The B&B's guest book is full of praise from those, from all over the world, who have dared to stay the night: "It was a bit scary at first for mortals. But we will be back," says one entry.

Previous guests have included people like The Dark

Lord Moriarti and The Lady Morticia Death Cat but Kev, a former welder from Holmfirth (where Last of the Summer Wine is filmed), points out that, as well as Goths, Bats does get its fair share of ordinary guests, or "normals" as we are known in Goth circles.

"Children find out about us and bring their parents along. We had an 80-year-old who came for her birthday last year. And she's coming back this year as well. We get a lot of honeymooners. Sometimes it's just people who are curious. We get all ages.

"Some people walk to the door and do an about-turn. They say 'it's not for me', they won't sleep in a spider's web bed, or they're frightened of the dragons and gargoyles. The coffins are off-putting for some people."

Continued on page 6 ►



THE LOOK

- Kev and Tish's lifesize Dracula came from Andy Thornton's reclamation and salvage yard in Halifax.
- Gargoyles came from various garden centres
- Other gothic items came from some of Whitby's many gothic crafts shops including: gothic Crafts (01947 825595), Venus Trading (01947 601221) and Pandemonium (01947 821955)

BATTY?: Kev and partner Tish love their gothic guesthouse

Pictures: RICHARD DOUGHTY



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NE interiors



FOR THE MIDNIGHT HOURS: a bit spooky, but hardly the stuff of nightmares

Spooky Towers

► Continued from page 5

But there is no shortage of customers willing to stay in one of their spooky but luxurious, four poster bedrooms. Thanks to its Dracula associations, Whitby is now known as the Goth capital of Britain. This music and fashion sub culture, often described as post-punk, celebrates all things dark, morbid and horrifying.

And Whitby's Goth Weekend music, art and cultural festivals, which first started 12 years ago, now regularly attract crowds of around 3,000 weird and wonderful, fantastically black-clad Gothic creatures from all over the country.

Whitby, which hosts its next big Goth Weekend on October 27-28, appears to have taken the Goths to its heart. "It is all great fun and very popular. We are fully booked for Goth Weekends up to 2007," says Kev.

Kev and his partner Tish, who used to have a babyclothes shop in Holmfirth, escaped Last of The Summer Wine country five years ago, when they came up with their inspired idea for a gothic guesthouse.

The pair, who consider themselves punks-who-always-dress-in-black rather than Goths, have always had a fascination with horror films, especially the old Hammer House of Horror movies. And Tish had a love of Whitby, after holidaying here many times as a child.

The couple, who have two children, Martha, 13, and Archie, ten, have had a scream decorating the house. My favourite room is the basement, where guests enjoy a thrilling, candlelit breakfast with music from bands like The Damned, Dead Kennedys and Marilyn Manson playing in the background.

As one of the guests comments: "It's a breakfast to die for." Tish, whose long, black hair has two Morticia Munster-style white streaks, stresses the meals are conventional, although she confesses that once, when one regular guest annoyed her by coming in late and making noise, she made him black scrambled eggs. "He wouldn't eat it," she laughs.

Everything from the crockery to the radiators is black and there is a magnificent black, gothic fireplace, which they had specially made in Leeds. There are also assorted rats, skulls, witches, dragons, gargoyles and bats, as well as macabre pictures on the walls and a

model of the Grim Reaper.

Every bedroom, each with its own theme, has a four poster bed, some of them wrought iron, made by Kev, in the shape of bats and spiders' webs. One room has an impressive view of the famous Abbey on the hill. "It looks great by night," says Kev. And every guest has a copy of Bram Stoker's Dracula on the bedside table, an alternative, Kev explains, to the Bible.

As in most guesthouses, there are pictures of local scenes on the walls, but here there is a picture of a ghost in a graveyard, an eerie Whitby Abbey by moonlight and the Demetrius, the ship that famously deposited its coffins on Whitby's shoreline. The bedside light is decorated with a skull and crossbones. Even the guest towels have skeletons embroidered on them.

"There are no chintzy curtains or flowery wallpaper and bedspeads," explains Kev. Most of the fabrics are deep, lush coloured textured velvets.

The bathrooms, with clean, white fittings and tiles, are pretty straightforward: "It is a bit hard to horror-ify a bathroom," says Kev, although I can't help noticing the impressive snakeskin wallpaper.

The two lifesize coffins, one with the words "Extreme caution - vampire in transit" etched on it, came from a friend.

At one point, I am startled by another sinister Dracula figure emerging out of the wall above my head, holding two stakes in his hands. I feel like a child on the ghost train again, half laughing, half wary, not sure quite what to expect next.

There is a collection of horror videos for guests to watch, everything from The Addams Family to Interview with a Vampire and I Married An Axe Murderer. Books on the shelves include The Birth of Horror and Nostradamus.

There are also more conventional Disney children's videos. But beware: on closer inspection, the teddy, bear named Redmond Gore, in a box on top of the wardrobe in one bedroom, is holding a bloody axe in its paws.

At Halloween, the house is even spookier: "We dress it up a bit," says Kev. At Christmas, they also go to town, decorating with black Christmas trees and garlic. But Kev, clearly not the sort of man prone to outlandish flights of fancy in an attempt to drum up business, won't



GOTHIC FEAST: breakfasts to die for are served in the basement

be drawn on talk of ghosts. When I point out a few chilling references in the guest book to a kettle that mysteriously switches itself on and off through the night, he mutters something about the possibility of a faulty thermostat. I have to search harder for evidence of any weird goings-on.

When I read the guest book further, there are a number of reports of people seeing ghosts. Kev finally admits: "We do hear footsteps in the night. And we see shadows sometimes. We have had some guests who have taken photos of orbs, which are meant to be spirits, in one bedroom."

When I ask him if he believes in ghosts, he says rather enigmatically: "I suppose, why not..."

Although they look the part, behind the scenes, this is no Addams family. What comes across is how warm, friendly and down-to-earth they all are. While teenage Martha is also a Goth, and all her friends think the house is "really cool", Kev stresses that they lead a typically normal life. "I suppose it's a bit different, but to us, this is normal. We just get on with things, like everybody else."

■ **Bats and Broomsticks, Gothic Guest House, 11, Prospect Hill, Whitby, North Yorkshire YO21 1QE. Tel: (01947) 605659. Website: www.batsandbroomsticks.com**



Previous guests have included people like *The Dark Lord Moriarti and The Lady Morticia Death Cat*



WARNING WELCOME: the coffin in the hallway and below, the bathroom's duck of death

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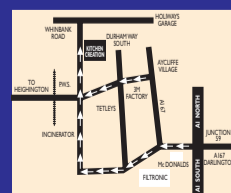


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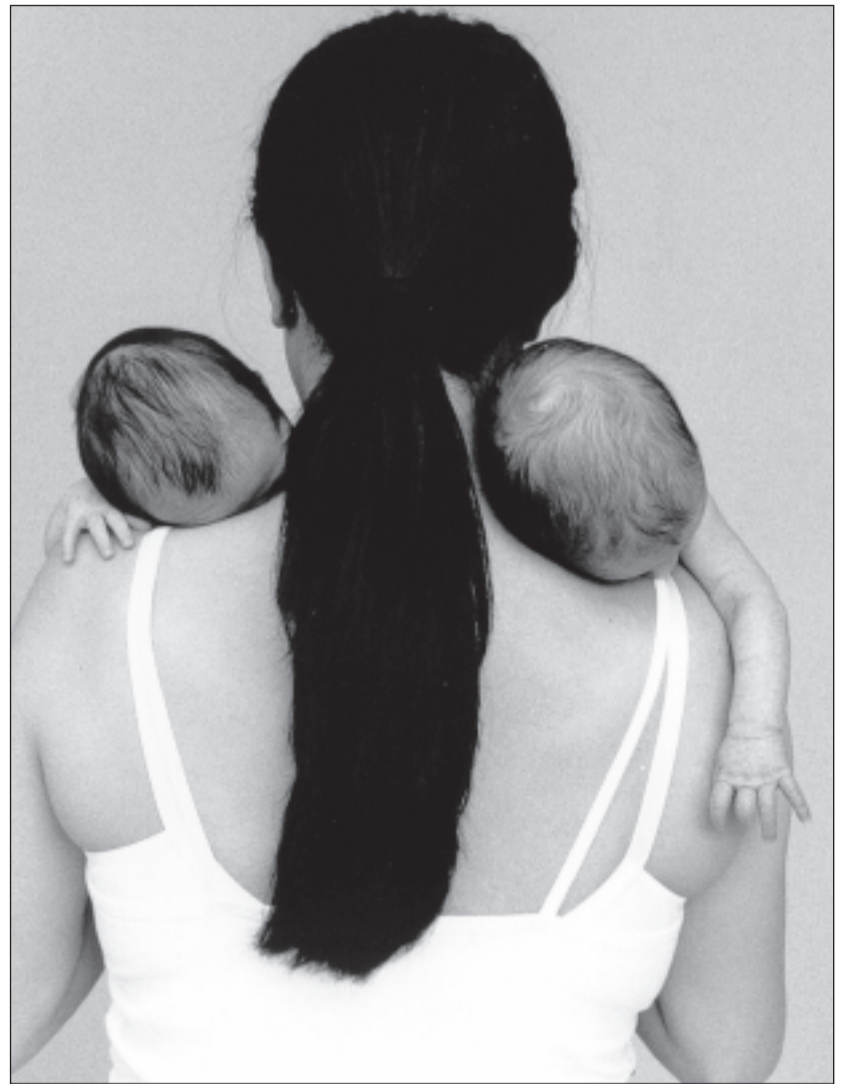


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He's captured royalty and major stars like Ronan Keating on film. Now Gary Walsh is finding fame as one of Britain's top photographers. He talks to Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER about his passion for taking pictures



Showbiz, royalty, sportsmen – Gary's shot the lot

THERE can't be many jobs in which tears are welcome but for photographer Gary Walsh, they make his day. Not that he's a sadist – in fact, from meeting him at his studio, in Norton, near Stockton, I can confidently say he's not – he's just a sucker for pulling heart strings. And when he hears that telltale silence, sees the lip start to quiver, he knows he's struck gold. A prime example of this was when he shot a calendar for Teesside Hospice.

"The icing on the cake was when I presented the images to Maureen, the chief executive," Gary recalls. "She was in tears because I'd captured everything she wanted. She was so surprised – she said she hardly ever cries."

Thankfully for Gary, 39, who's always lived in the Teesside suburb where he has his business, the tears invariably give way to smiles. A rising star, his list of subjects includes the

rarely-glimpsed royal Sophie Wessex and more celebs than you can shake a stick at. When asked to name-drop he looks abashed but cheerfully complies.

"In the past I've photographed Princess Anne and Prince Philip. Sophie Wessex was very like Lady Di," Gary confides. "I've done Ronan Keating. That was a lovely event, although he was late due to taking his children to see the (Christmas) window in Fenwicks. I've also done Beverley Knight, Darius, Daniel Bedingfield, Bananarama..."

So how did Gary land such plum assignments? He says the circumstances varied. "I worked with Princess Anne and Prince Philip when I used to do a lot of work at Durham University," he says. "Sophie Wessex was an invitation from a company in Leeds. They invited her to officially open the new building and I was one of three photographers who were invited. The others were shots for Cen-

tury radio. If anybody is coming to the area I'll get the call."

Through Gary's ties with Stockton council, he got another high profile job. "I got to photograph the Seve Trophy at Wynard last year," he says, proudly showing me a signed print of all the golfers. "It was an access all areas thing. It was fabulous. The nice thing about it was I got to cover it in my style of photography. I spent a couple of mornings photographing the groundsman flattening the greens at five o'clock."

Gary's style, it turns out, is a bit of a hybrid; a blend of classic and reportage. "I tend to find it's a mixture of the two," he says. "The bottom line is you've got to make people look their best and reportage might not. I was classically trained and although the poses are very loose and natural I've still got to make people look good."

By anyone's standards, Gary's rise has

been fast. He only started out seriously in 1999, when he acquired the studio, but hearing him talk, it's clear photography is in his blood. "I always had an interest," he says. "Even when I was 14 we used to go out and I'd always have a camera with me."

Yet when he left school Gary took a different path. "I had all the forms and everything for art college but at the last minute I decided just to go into the work environment, which was engineering. I hated it," he says. "I did that for a couple of years, then at 19 I went to college to study photography. I did my City and Guilds and then I got a job in a mini lab for a while, which was just developing and printing. I then went on to start in a professional commercial lab and worked through to lab manager."

Though he was now in the photo industry, Gary still wasn't happy. "I used to print all the work from photographers in the area and it

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SHOOTING STARS: top, Gary in his studio. Left to right: Ronan Keating; a child, all wrapped up; singer Darius



was quite frustrating printing when I wanted to be taking. So what I started doing was shooting weddings on a weekend."

Pretty soon Gary was in demand and as the photography work came in, he realised something had to give. A twist of fate told him what. "I won a competition by the Guild of Wedding Photographers which took me on a week's photographic training in Madeira," says Gary. "That was in 1999. The same year I bought this building and I started officially in 2000."

At first Gary did a lot of commercial work, just accepting what was offered, but as his reputation grew, he was able to focus on what he loves: taking pictures of people. "It's a mix really," says Gary, describing his current trade. "I still do quite a lot of weddings, also outdoor portraits, especially at this time of year. Plus there's still the commercial side."

And Gary has caught the attention of some pretty big firms. A recent coup was being asked to work for Sony, taking pictures of and testing its cameras, and among his proudest achievements to date has been the use of two of his images on Marks & Spencer's cards. We pause the interview so he can show me them – there's a shot of flowers and one of girls, their backs to the camera, in angel wings. I'm full of compliments: they're really good.

It's no surprise that one of the pictures is of children. Throughout the studio are countless more – a little girl with rosebud lips, a brother and sister, a boy posing with a car... I ask if Gary, who's dad to Emily, 14, and 11-year-old Lucy,

prefers his subjects young. "I particularly like taking pictures of families and children but I find with children, it's the rewards," he says. "Parents can be literally sat here sobbing." (We're back to crying). "It's fantastic to be the cause of that."

Yet making children sit still at all, let alone for long enough to capture them, would seem an uphill struggle. Gary claims he has his tricks. "What I don't do is come straight up to them because I'm 6ft tall. I just keep my distance," he says. "I find with children if the parents are comfortable, the children very quickly pick up on that. I'll avoid making any contact with the child for the first ten minutes or so and speak to the parents, then once the child knows they're in a comfortable environment and their parents seem happy, they'll be more open."

Of course with older children, the rules are different. How does he cope with surly teens? "I think with teenagers you can very quickly win them over," says Gary confidently. "I can talk about who I've photographed and they're very impressed. I'm very interested in music so I can talk to them about that. I also talk to them about what they're interested in. It's a challenge, but it's a good challenge."

So what's the secret of his success? Gary's answer is strikingly simple. "The thing is I do have a genuine interest in people and I think that comes across," he says. "I think that's the key."

■ Gary Walsh Photography, London House, 75 High Street, Norton (01642) 355205
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NE gardening

Linda and Alan Watkinson make a good team when it comes to gardening: she does the design and planting, he does the structural work. SHEILA WEBER is impressed with the results



SITTING PRETTY: Linda takes a well-earned break from the gardening

Pictures: RICHARD DOUGHTY

'If I love it, I buy it'

WHEN Linda and Alan Watkinson moved house there was no question about it. It was summer. The garden came first. "We decided to do the outside rather than the inside," says Linda, a self-confessed 'gardening nut'.

Three years on, Linda's one acre of garden is a picture and a credit to her imagination and hard work.

The couple have been at Manfield in Thornton-le-Moor, North Yorkshire for around three years, following their move from Thrintoft where they had lived for 34 years.

"We gutted everything, inside and out. It was really hard work," says Linda, "There were quite a few weeds and more grass than we wanted in the orchard. We have put thousands of bulbs in and cut down fir trees which were blocking light from the house."

Linda admits she has always been into gardening. "Always," she says. "I love it. It's my life. I had a little garden of my own when I was seven or eight years old and my parents were

very much into it. It was a family thing. But I am a plantaholic, always have been."

If she goes shopping, there are not many days she doesn't come back with a plant for the garden.

Alan, she says, does not have green fingers but is invaluable as a help in making structures such as a pagoda and decking. "If it concerns structures, I think things up and he does the work. I deal with design and concept," says Linda. "I don't know the names of all the plants. I just know what I like and if I like it, I buy it."

Linda, a mother of two, has learned her craft simply through getting on with things. "I sometimes read gardening magazines but I don't get carried away," she says.

On good days, she is out in the garden until 10pm. She only takes a rest in winter, but even then she often finds something to do. "People think I'm crackers, they did especially when I was younger. But I am a gardening nut."

Occasionally, Linda will take time out to sit in the garden and enjoy it - especially if the grandchildren are around.





Favourite plants: lilies, roses and delphiniums
Tool I would least like to be without: lawnmower. I like cutting grass.
Tip for others: make your own compost



She favours herbaceous borders, creating lots of colour in the garden area. She and Alan have also taken down trees, made a patio, a pond, laid more lawns, decking, planted shrubs and sorted out a greenhouse.

As well as flowers, shrubs and trees, Linda grows vegetables and fruit. She has two vegetable patches which yield potatoes, lettuce, onions, beetroot, runner beans, tomatoes, chillis, cucumbers, peppers. Her fruit trees bear apples and pears, mulberries and walnuts. Elsewhere, the couple keep chickens.

Linda does all the physical work, such as digging and trimming edges. "I find it is getting a bit harder as I get older," she says. But it's a labour of love which is never finished. "It's like painting the Forth Bridge."

The question of taking on a gardener is taboo. "I want to do it myself as long as I can," she says. "I couldn't bear for someone else to take over."

Next on the agenda is replacing concrete with paving slabs at the front of the house.

"It is a rolling programme of keeping up with things," says Linda. "Part of the front was a jungle and this is the main area we are working on now."



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AUTUMN COLOURS: Topshop Bow wool baker boy cap, £15, and Principles' cowl neck tunic, £45

The shape of things to come

Grey was the dominant colour on the autumn-winter collection catwalks. SHEREEN LOW highlights the other fashion trends coming our way

ANOTHER summer has come to an end. We've said goodbye to the warm weather and packed away the skimpies for winter. But if there is an up-

side to this time of year, it's got to be the excuse to furnish yourself with a whole new wardrobe.

This autumn sees the continuation of several trends from last winter – like masculine styling and voluminous shapes – but also the return of styles like tartan and the 1980s.

“At the autumn/winter fashion shows we saw a distinct departure from the soft, pretty femininity of the past few seasons, as designers cut a cleaner silhouette and toyed with the concept of shape,” says Alexandra Shulman, editor-in-chief at Vogue.

“The possibilities of texture and layering were cleverly explored while the palette, though predominantly dark, was occasionally electrified with brilliant flashes of colour. It was a dramatic touch, and a sure sign that fashion is moving in an intriguingly new direction.”



GREY: the colour of winter



LIKE A MAN

BRING out the wide-legged trousers that you wore last winter because they're back in again. But dressing manly doesn't mean you have to sacrifice your girliness.

“It's a sexier take on menswear traditions – it's not just a girl putting on a man's suit,” says Kate Phelan, Vogue's fashion director.

Trouser suits are back with a vengeance, inspired by feminine yet assertive women like Marlene Dietrich and the models at Gucci. For casualwear, try swapping your skinny jeans for wide-legged boy-cut jeans.

Get the look with: Next's belted stripe trousers, £24.99, Marks & Spencer's long black tuxedo jacket, £69.50, pictured left, or Warehouse's cream Boyfriend shirt, £30





GO GREY

Shades of grey, from steel to silver, graced the autumn/winter catwalks, providing a softer alternative to timeless black. The colour echoes the ladylike looks of the 1940s and was among the most elegant on the catwalks, covered by Louis Vuitton, Marni and Giorgio Armani.

Grey coats – belted or voluminous – are one of winter's most stylish cover-ups, but tailored shift dresses and two-piece suits also embody its understated chic. Pintucks and pleats look sophisticated, or play with textures and colours by mixing shades up.

Get the look with: Wallis' grey cowl neck sweater, £30, pictured left, Dorothy Perkins' grey checked wide-leg trousers, £25, or Principles' Selma grey shoes, £75.



VOLUME

THIS doesn't mean that we'll all be donning fashion for larger ladies in the next few months. We're talking volume, even more than last winter's tulip and puffball skirts. The new cocoon shape, seen at John Rocha's catwalk show, pictured right, features in most items, from skirts and dresses to coats and jumpers.

"Pinpointing a return to structure, the new voluminous silhouette hints at the sculptural forms of couture tailoring. Curving from the shoulders or waist, the 'cocoon' reflects an increasingly modernist mood," Alexandra says.

Get the look with: New Look's yellow dogtooth coat, £70, above, JL's bell skirt, £55 at John Lewis, or Tu's grey bubble dress, £20 at Sainsbury's.



THE EIGHTIES

IF you're old enough to remember the 1980s, you'll cringe at this blast from the past – but whether you like it or not, it's back in fashion. Leggings and footless tights, sweater dresses, all-in-one jumpsuits and ankle boots are bound to be on your hit-list. Play up the trend with jolts of electric colour in fuchsia pink, purple or electric blue, or stay safe with black.

Get the look with: French Connection's grey belted sweater dress, £60, Faith's Swirl ankle boots, £70, pictured above, or Miss Sixty's black Lurex jump-suit, £110.



HIGHLAND FLING

ONCE reserved for Scots and royalty, the traditional plaid pattern is making a bold statement this autumn, thanks to patriotic designers Julien Macdonald and Alexander McQueen. Anyone can wear this versatile look with a tweed coat or a cute and chic tartan skirt. If you want to make more of an impression, choose eveningwear made out of tartan – a bold look which the confident can carry off.

Get the look with: Gil Bret's brown checked blazer, £265, pictured left, Peacocks' tartan wrap mini-skirt, £10, or Marks & Spencer's tartan corset top, £35.



METALLIC: Next straight-leg embroidered jeans, £44.99, with bustier top

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NE my style



Allison McKay is Creative Director of NE Representation, a new media agency with an office base in Coniscliffe Road, Darlington.

With a background as a session stylist in the fashion and beauty industry, Allison returned to her North-East roots to find a lack of representation in this region for photographers, models, stylists, hair and make-up artists and film extras.

NE Representation is developing a strong database of all of the above and has seen some of its applicants starring in TV commercials, documentary dramas and advertising imagery, as well as its credits being on fashion photographic shoots for local and national magazines.

Describe your look.
Smart but comfortable... but never so comfy that I'd wear a saggy tracksuit!

What's your favourite item of clothing?
The white Armani Jeans I am wearing from The House in Yarm, the silver silk dress from Monsoon and the brown skirt, which was made by a fashion student at Northumbria University, are all favourites. My long-term favourite, though, is a long black and white long full circle wrap skirt. I bought it years ago from Oxfam in Carnaby Street. It is so over-worn, but I have many happy memories wearing this skirt, I can't throw it out, so I save it for holidays.

What is the most you have ever spent on an item of clothing?
In relation to earnings, when I was 17 years old and a trainee hairdresser earning £54 a week, I spent my £100 savings on a dress that was in the sale to go to my first ball with a new flash boyfriend. Unfortunately, I never got to the ball and the shop wouldn't give me a refund. Not a happy memory dress. I gave it away.

What are your favourite shops?
The House in Yarm for its service, surroundings and stock and Zara for its reasonable prices and choice. Apart from that, I will shop anywhere I see something I like, and like many women, I can't pass by a bargain.

What has been your worst buy?



The hideous dress I bought for the ball that I never got to.

What is your favourite beauty product?
I love the Liz Earle Naturally Active skincare range, especially Cleanse and Polish.

Have you any beauty tips?
Stress has a negative effect on the skin – worry lines, lack of sleep etc. Through personal experience of this I have noticed how scents can uplift and calm moods, which in turn has a positive effect on the skin (we all know we are far more appealing when we are happy). Jo Malone Red Roses makes me feel happy and light while Tisserand lavender bath oil calms me after a stressful day before sleep.

Whose celebrity style do you admire and why?
Kate Winslet because her wardrobe is never predictable. She dresses tastefully, yet to suit herself, and she uses fashion to enhance her features rather than mask them. I also admire Sarah Jessica Parker's creative and colourful style.

Tel: 01325-488385 www.nerepresentation.com.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
brown skirt made by fashion student teamed with top from Turkey; favourite white trousers from The House in Yarm, with Max Mara jacket, Oasis top and Next brown wedges; Monsoon silk dress



gadget man



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All the gadgets that go with your computer have now been welded into one. And it has plenty of tricks up its sleeve

IF YOU own a laptop computer, chances are you know the feeling. You get your shiny new purchase home and sit back admiring its slim lines and portability. Then reality starts to dawn.

Your £1,000 PC may be featherweight but what about all the peripherals needed to make it useful?

You need a printer, a scanner, a memory card reader to access those pictures taken by your digital camera, an infra red plug-in for your mobile (or a Bluetooth add-on) and so the list goes on. Soon the space next to your new laptop is filled with all manner of extra devices.

Unless, that is, you decide to combine all of these things into one piece of equipment.

The Epson Photo RX640 is that device. It successfully combines a top-of-the-range photo printer with a multiple card reader, an infra red receiver, a slide scanner and a photo scanner. It's not exactly small (and you wouldn't carry it around with that laptop)

but it does replace four or five bits of kit that take up far more room.

The trouble with these all-in-ones used to be the old adage: Jack of all trades, master of none.

The print quality was always at least one generation behind the best attainable and the scans were a bit murky to say the least. Few offered transparency scanning and if they did the results were distinctly iffy.

So what a pleasant surprise it was to discover how much things have changed.

Firstly, print quality on the RX640 is every bit as good as Epson's other dedicated photo units. It actually uses the same ink cartridges (six of them, so you don't have to throw out a three-colour cart when just the one colour is

exhausted) as genuine photo printers and the results are simply stunning, especially when matched to Epson's own photo paper. I printed our favourite photo of my one-year-old son Jack on A4 and the picture was easily good enough to frame.

As a printer the RX has other tricks up its sleeve, too. It can print from all the major memory cards, including SD cards, churning out 6x4/5x7 and full A4 prints in double quick time. It also prints to CDs and DVDs with a special adaptor.

And when you use the scanner it can scan a slide or a photo and spit out a print at the press of a button. A little colour screen allows you to preview the print before committing to it.

In fact, the RX is so good that you can access all but its most advanced features without even connecting it to a PC. If you are a photographer who has just moved to digital and is wondering what to do with those old 35mm film prints and slides, then this is the machine for you.

For the rest of us, it's time to throw out your old scanner and printer, the RX640 is the ultimate space saving companion.



If you are a photographer who has just moved to digital and is wondering what to do with those old 35mm film prints and slides, then this is the machine for you

RETRO RADS

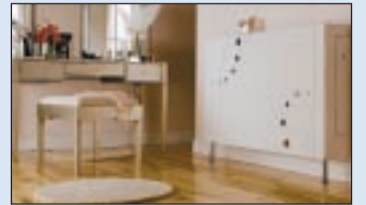
MAKE a statement with these funky new retro-style radiator cabinets from Richard Burbidge. The 1970s inspired Sideboard cabinet looks like furniture and covers up unsightly radiators at the same time. The cabinet features two slots to help the warm air flow around the room and is supplied fully finished, in lacquered light oak veneered MDF. Or for groovy geometric style straight from the 1960s, why not consider the new Ripple design? Available pre-primed to paint whatever colour you choose, the Ripple cabinet features stylish chrome-effect feet that can be adjusted to fit different radiator heights. The design also includes a handy new removable magnetic side panel for easy access to thermostatic valves.

Both cabinets are available exclusively from B&Q. Prices start from £119 for the Sideboard and from £65 for Ripple.

COSY NIGHTS

FOR those of us who feel the cold, getting warm in bed in winter can be a struggle. Morphy Richards has one solution with its new washable heated underblanket, which costs just 2.8 pence per night to run and has an overheat protection system for peace of mind. The blanket is both machine washable and tumble dry safe and features reversible material.

The blanket is available in two



sizes and retails at £19.99 for a single and £24.99 for a double. For further stockist information call 0870-060-2614 or take a look at the website www.morphyrichards.com.

DUCK DABBLING

EVERY home, car and garden shed should have at least one roll of Duck Tape, just in case something

needs mending, binding or holding together. Once only available in silver, it's now even more useful in a range of ten colours to suit different tasks. Duck Tape is known for its combination of strength and tearability. Available from DIY and hardware stores, the tape is £6 for a large roll, just over £3 for a small.



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PARADISE REGAINED: the Costa Callida and Costa Blanca

Want a place in the sun?



Businessman Steve Johnson, pictured left, knows exactly how to take the strain out of buying in Spain. He explains the attractions of an investment property there to SHEILA WEBER

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MAR MENOR ENTERPRISES

COSTA CALLIDA

STEVE Johnson is a firm believer in the personal touch. Which is why he makes a point of providing just that for people looking to buy property on the Spanish coast. Steve is the local introduction agent for two companies offering help to those seeking a place in the sun – HG Properties, run by Helen Gregory, and Mar Menor Enterprises, run by Mike Price.

He himself is a Spanish home owner and has many contacts with property owners and developers, as well as friends in the Costa Blanca region and further south to the Costa Callida.

At both places, clients can be met at the airport, taken to their accommodation and shown around the area before they view the development/property for sale. "There is no pressure, no hard sell," says Steve. "We can even accompany the prospective buyer across to Spain."

Steve, the agent for the Mar Menor area on the Costa Callida, says that after an informal meeting in England the service is extended to Spain where the client is given guidance and information tailored to their individual requirements.

Born in Redcar, Steve is 55 and has run a finance business in the East Cleveland town for nearly 20 years.

"I think giving people the chance to have a good look round the developments in Spain is a nice touch," he says. "It really helped me and I ended up buying somewhere. It gave me a feel-good factor as I went out there on total trust."

More and more Brits are investing in a place in the sun, as TV programmes testify. The Richard and Judy Show recently featured the Trampolin Hills Golf Resort, one of the many new beautiful resorts in Spain. You can buy one of these superb four-bedroom, three-bathroom detached villas through Steve from around 245,000 euros. "And our organisations don't just leave you with the sales agent but provide proper back-up," says Steve.

In terms of investment, Steve is very pleased with his own purchase. "I have a lovely place on the Costa Blanca. In May 2003, I bought it for 163,000 euros off-plan and on completion it was valued by the bank at 320,000 euros."

His UK home is in Sedgfield and Steve originally took family holidays in Portugal and loved it, although it is much harder to buy property there.

"We started going to Spain and I began to get a good feeling for the lifestyle that people have," he says. "Mar Menor has miles of coast and

stunning mountains. When I arrive there now, I feel as if I am at home."

Steve says he might retire to Spain – but not on a permanent basis. "I'll maybe spend a four/five months in Spain and the rest in this country," he says. "I have a number of friends who have done it and they are truly happy."

"I have clients from Redcar, for example. They are publicans and have bought a place close to my own home. They absolutely love it."

Prices start from £50,000, ranging from one-bedroomed apartments to townhouses and luxury villas. All are in prime locations.

One of the new developments in Mar Menor is Ribera Beach, close to the top class La Manga Club. Celebrities such as Sir Alex Ferguson have homes around here.

Secluded Ribera Beach belongs to a new generation of projects with a style of architecture carefully designed to blend in with an attractive landscape. There are large green areas and limited high-rise development. It is a stone's throw from the best beach on the 'crystal sea' in the region and still has a lovely rural feel.

Costa Callida is serviced by Murcia airport.

COSTA BLANCA

HELEN Gregory, the freelance estate agent for the Costa Blanca, has been a personal friend of Steve's for the past 30 years. She's been a Spanish property owner for 23 years and had lived on the Costa Blanca for nine years. She feels like a native to the area, is able to give the best possible advice and has direct contact with builders and developers.

The airport for the Costa Blanca is close to the beautiful city of Alicante, a bustling place with good shops ranging from upmarket designer stores to affordable outlets. It also boasts a marina.

San Juan, further down the coastline, also boasts a pretty marina and miles of golden sandy beach beside the Mediterranean sea.

Separated by a headland is El Campello, another marina and beautiful sandy beach. El Campello has restaurants and tapas bars, many lining the promenade. A short distance further along the coast you have the beautiful resorts of Altea and Albir.

There is a real Spanish feel to the area, good local markets, theme parks and many excellent golf courses, including the well known Bonalba.

Whatever your taste, there is something for the discerning property buyer, whether it be for investment purposes or for your dream holiday home.

Home from home



CARING: staff member Maria Moss tidies one of the rooms. Below: Vicky Lambert in the lounge

FOR more than a century, there has been a tradition of care in the North Yorkshire village of Scorton. Continuing the heritage today is Gratia Care but in a way that is much more in line with modern nursing than the conventional care provided by a former private hospital and old people's home.

Managing director Simon Loveridge says: "The care industry is evolving and in the last ten years alone aspirations and standards have increased greatly. There is a better understanding of the complex range of needs that people have and as a result, the levels of training have increased. People have recognised that the future is to build modern facilities where people can continue to enjoy a full and varied life."

Gratia Care bought the former St John of God hospital three years ago. Just last month its newly built 60-bed care home opened, providing purpose-built, en suite accommodation for residents who previously lived in the former hospital.

Residents are placed into four groups of 15 rooms with each group having its own lounge and dining room so friendships can develop. In addition to the residential care for elderly and general nursing care, Gratia also offers specialist Alzheimer's care, which often is not available elsewhere.

"Dementia is increasing because people are living longer. It's something we all have to face. But there is no reason why people with dementia can't get involved in social activities. It's about interaction and understanding their needs and aspirations, as well as the aspirations of their families."

"We have exceeded the minimum requirements for national care standards and the building itself has been shortlisted for a design award. But it's mainly about quality of care for people who have nursing needs or some level of dementia," says Simon.

Meanwhile, the main Victorian building is part way through a complete renovation. It will eventually provide assisted suite-based living



for residents who can look after themselves most of the time but need some support close at hand.

It also provides residential care for elderly mentally ill people, general nursing care and specialist Alzheimer's care, often not available elsewhere because of the high level of support that is needed.

A second new-build project will offer 24 apartments to rent or to buy leasehold for elderly people living independently but with access to the social side of the care village complex.

The emphasis is very much on the benefits of providing a varied social life for residents, which includes a coffee shop, cinema, flower shop, library and plenty of occupational therapy activities both for residents and adults who need extra support who make day visits from Richmond, Northallerton and Darlington.

"We encourage people to have as normal a life as possible, including trips out for residents and activities involving people from the community," says Simon.

TIPS FOR CHOOSING A CARE HOME

■ **Think and plan ahead.** For many families, their first thoughts about care for an elderly relative come when there is a crisis, ie, they go into hospital after a fall which results in them needing additional care.

■ Visit homes that you think may be suitable. There is a lot of stigma over what homes are like but it's often based on myth. Again, visit before reaching crisis point so you already have an idea of what your preferred options might be. By planning ahead you are also more likely to get a place in the home you want.

■ **Make their surroundings as familiar as possible.** Dress their room with personal items to make them feel at home.

■ **Be realistic about cost.** High quality, full time care does not come cheap. Good homes have to pay nursing staff NHS rates and have stringent regulations and standards to meet. As with most things, you get what you pay for. Consider the cost of living in a hotel on a full-board basis.

■ Communication is key. Care home owner Simon Loveridge says: "Many people do not want an elderly relative or loved one to go into a care home. In the first few weeks Gratia spends as much time talking with relatives as we do residents. It's about understanding and



PURPOSE-BUILT: Gratia Care

adapting. Your lifestyle may not make it practical to look after an elderly person at home."

■ **Put your relative's needs first.** Take time to discuss with care professionals to work out what are your relative's specific needs. Modern care offers plenty of choice to meet individual needs. It is important that these needs are identified, albeit they may change over time.

■ Remember, ill elderly people can recover. Going into a home does not automatically mean they will not be able to return home once they have recovered.

Gratia Care Ltd is delighted to announce the opening of a brand new purposely designed care home, which provides specialist nursing and dementia care in the outstanding location of Scorton, one of the prettiest villages in north Yorkshire

This new care home forms part of the existing Abbey Care Village, and boasts a standard of accommodation and care which more than exceeds expectations.

Set in delightful landscaped gardens, the new facility also offers the benefits of existing on-site amenities such as a restaurant, coffee shop and cinema suite providing a stimulating social life for those who wish.

All accommodation is in beautifully appointed single rooms with en-suite facilities, providing every comfort and a homely and private living space. All rooms have points for satellite television and are fitted with individual phone lines to help residents keep in touch with their loved ones.

The Abbey Care Home has been designed to be a real home from home with intimate residents' lounges and separate dining facilities throughout the building which encourage social interaction in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

Our experienced and qualified staff are trained to provide care and support without compromising the individuals choice and beliefs and aim to maximise their independence. Residents are treated with respect and dignity; we take into account their ability, interest and preferences, focusing on their quality of life.

To find out more about the Abbey Care Home or Gratia Care Ltd and our availability, please telephone us on (01748) 811971 or write to us at:

Gratia Care Ltd,
Abbey Care Village, Scorton,
North Yorkshire DL10 6EB



There is no reason why people with dementia can't get involved in social activities

Do you take this business partner...?



After having her wedding dress designed by Barbara Douglas, Allison Mendelsohn began selling bridal shoes – and now the two work in tandem. They talk to Women's Editor SARAH FOSTER



DOUBLE ACT: Allison at her wedding with Barbara, who designed the traditional dress with a hint of flamenco

AS someone who struggled to find a wedding dress, when Barbara Douglas talks, I'm keen to listen. The couture designer, who works exclusively on bridal gowns, explains that unless you're a perfect 12, it can be hard to find your fit. "Oh yes," I grimly concede, the careworn faces of my mum and sister springing to mind.

My problem was being too small – I looked like I'd raided the dressing-up box – but Barbara says that equally, you can be too big for the standard sizes in the shops. How she can help is fairly obvious: by giving you something that's made to measure. "I usually work a year to nine months in advance because everything is done by hand," she says. "It's not like off the peg – I've got to have a lot of advance warning. All final fittings are done close to the wedding to ensure a perfect fit."

Barbara's business, Barbara Douglas Bridal Couture, has now been going for 15 years. She works alone, from a purpose-built studio at her Newton Aycliffe home, and while she's untrained, she's had experience designing night wear and lingerie. Yet making wedding gowns is her true vocation. She speaks of crafting the perfect dress with obvious zeal.

"There are over 2,000 fabric samples that I can use to provide a bespoke gown for the customer, and that's what brides want these days," says Barbara, 52. "Every gown is different – I never make two the same. I have about a dozen design samples ready made up for customers to try and the bride will try them and take ideas, then I'll turn them into an original."

It was this idea that first attracted Allison Mendelsohn. She was planning her wedding in southern Spain and quickly realised her dream dress – traditional white but with a hint of flamenco – was not available in the



shops. She went to Barbara and pretty soon a friendship grew. "I'd gone along as a customer and had my dress made and through the process, we clicked and became friends," says Allison, 39. "I helped Barbara out at a couple of wedding exhibitions then she said 'why don't you do something alongside me?' I found it difficult to get nice shoes for my wedding and she said there was a definite shortage of bridal shoes and accessories in this area so why didn't I start to provide that service locally?"

So about a year ago, Allison, who works part-time as a medical secretary, set up Exclusively Shoes. She says what she offers is unique. "The difference with my service is that I visit brides in their home and take the shoes to them," says Allison. "I buy the shoes in from about four different suppliers and I have about 25 sample pairs that I can take out to show brides. I've got a good range for everybody's budget but of the nicer shoes, as opposed to some of the awful square-heeled things you see. I think shoes are becoming more and more a part of the day."

With prices starting at £50, the range encompasses top designers. You can even rival Jordan in sparkly sandals by Benjamin Adams as worn by her bridesmaids. What's even better is that most styles can be dyed, thus ensuring a perfect match.

For Barbara and Allison, who live within minutes of each other, their personal friendship has forged a link between their businesses. As Barbara explains, this

benefits brides. "I can commission tiaras to go with my gowns, as well as veils, while Allison takes care of the shoes, handbags and garters," she says. "The lady would come to me for the dress and I would recommend that she go and see Allison for the shoes. We're seeing that it works when we work together but obviously Allison is completely independent."

One thing Barbara is keen to stress is that they're giving options, not trying to browbeat. "It's not that my brides have to go to Allison for shoes - it's just a help to the bride really, instead of having to trail around," she says.

With customers coming from all over the country, Barbara is well established. While Allison is less so, her fledgling business is taking flight. What's most important, according to Barbara, is their enjoyment of what they do. "We both love fashion and shoes and that's a great help," she says. "I think you do need to have flair. It's no good trying to sell something you don't like."

■ To make an appointment with Barbara, visit www.barbaradouglas.co.uk or call (01325) 312596 or mobile 07715 254117. A home visit by Allison can be arranged by visiting www.exclusivelyshoes.co.uk or calling (01325) 307388 or mobile (07971) 577572.



NE motoring

Dodge does it differently

IAN LAMMING is impressed by a vehicle in the medium-sized hatchback sector that is full of personality and punch

Dodge Caliber

IT'S not pretty, it's definitely not cute but it does demand respect. In the new Caliber, Dodge has produced a muscle car that stands head and shoulders above the rest.

Nothing is quite so bland as the medium-sized hatchback sector. Generally speaking, only the badge differentiates one from another as the computer and the wind tunnel sculpt shape and form. Dodge designers have obviously decided that just won't do and their first mainstream car to hit these shores certainly packs an aesthetic punch.

Most customers buy with their eyes and their hearts. They are looking for image as well as efficiency

and when they are spending the next biggest sum to the house, it has to be a pleasure purchase.

Caliber is something to get excited about and from the first glimpse shouts its personality long and loud.

An enormous grille and oversized headlamps give the Dodge real presence and trick the eye into thinking this Hummer-like creation is much larger than it actually is. Pronounced fenders and massive wheels continue the pretence and as you approach you expect to see an American GI perched behind the wheel.

Caliber continues to mess with your senses once inside. The high-set seats and chunky dash leave you feeling you are driving a big off

roader. You seem to tower above the rest of the traffic and the Caliber feels big, solid, bold and butch.

At the same time it feels 21st century, hip and happening. The smart dash is colour-matched to the exterior in shiny space age materials. The hooded clocks are white faced and attractive; the controls well placed and very easy to use.

Yanks love their toys so the Dodge comes bristling with plenty including aircon, electric windows, keyless central locking, tyre pressure monitor and a spleen shattering stereo, particularly if you go for the nine speaker upgrade with its groovy, rear hatch-mounted subs. There is also refrigeration for your glovebox drinks and centre cup



BOLD MOVES: the dash, below, is colour-matched to the exterior, and subs, above, can be hatch-mounted



holders come with cool blue lighting.

Under the skin lurk all manner of electronic wizardry including anti-lock brakes and, on the diesel, electronic stability programme.

The 138bhp 2.0 litre VW diesel is a little gem with great swathes of usable power flowing in from low down the rev range. It is smooth, accessible and very refined. It is also

nice and frugal with 46mpg promised on the combined cycle.

Coupled with a super-slick six-speed gearbox, Caliber is of the highest order in the driving stakes. It rides the bumps well and grips the road tenaciously through the bends. It is safe, secure, yet a lot of fun to boot. It feels different from most hatchbacks and it's a joy to drive.

Caliber dares to be different in every shape and form. It breaks an all-too familiar mould in the medium car market and it backs this initial punch with a flurry of counters that make it a fun, practical and hugely accomplished vehicle to drive as well. There's no doubting that this particular Dodge is of the highest Caliber.

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NE connections

York, the birds'-eye way

SHEILA WEBER views the ancient city of York and its attractions from a totally different perspective

THE line of bruises on the inside of my left arm looked suspect to say the least. I ached in places where I didn't even know I had places and blisters were beginning to form on my hands.

And I'd only been on a weekend visit to York...

For most people, mention of the city conjures up an image of ancient stone walls, the majestic Minster, medieval alleyways, the proud railway heritage.

But there is another, much more active, side to this tourist destination.

A weekend sampling some of the thrills and spills York has to offer was a revelation. It was fun with a capital F and a great contrast to the more cerebral attractions.

Blessed with fabulous summer weather, the schedule was a hoot from start to finish. We kicked off with a morning at the North of England Activity Centre near Rufforth, just a short drive from the city centre, trying out clay pigeon shooting, archery and quad bike riding.

I bagged a clay first shot, but it was beginner's luck and I often struggled to hold the gun correctly.

The archery was a nightmare and responsible for the bruises as the bowstring clattered against my skin after the arrow was released. It's tougher than it looks, too, to draw the string back by the amount needed for a good shot.

Quad-biking was great fun, even though we sweltered in special overalls, helmets and gloves. They are necessary, though, as accidents can be very nasty indeed.

After lunch we went to the York Gliding Centre in the Vale of York, about 20 miles east of the Pennines and free of controlled airspace to the north and south.

With an instructor, I took to the skies in a two-seater plane. A motor-glider 'tugs' you from the ground and disconnects the tow-rope when sufficient height has been reached. Scary stuff: set free, there is nothing but you and the elements. But once out on those thermals, you literally fly like a bird, with a bird's-eye view of York and its surrounds.

Sunday morning was spent on F1-style karting, which accounted for most of my aches and budding blisters due to the sheer effort needed to hold the vehicle steady as it speeds around the indoor track.

Staff at F1 racing at Monks Cross leisure park had organised an Italian Job-style session for us, an adrenaline-pumping package which would be perfect for a special birthday or anniversary gift, not to mention stag and hen parties.

Back in the city, I discovered streets buzzing with atmosphere. It is very stylish these days with lots of smart bars, cafes and eateries, and

To give people more chance to enjoy all that York has to offer, a new promotion is being launched from next month. Entitled Stay Longer, the scheme will run until March 31, 2007.

Visitors can choose from over 40 guest houses and hotels in the city, staying for three nights and paying for only two. Prices start at £52 per person for a three-night stay in a three-diamond guest house, going up to £160 for a three or four star hotel. For the first time there are also five self-catering options starting at £120 for three nights (price per let).

People should quote Stay Longer offer when booking at the Visitor Information Centres, tel 01904-550099 or book online at www.visit-york.org

Stay Longer visitors can buy a three-day York Pass (allowing entry into 30 visitor attractions) for the price of a two-day pass at a cost of £25 – a saving of £7.

has recently acquired the Yorkshire Wheel – its own version of the London Eye – which takes visitors 60 metres above York for spectacular views.

We stayed at the Park Inn Hotel – just a few minutes walk from the rail station and handy for most of the attractions York has to offer.

These included two wonderful restaurants – Melton's Too and the Ivy Brasserie. Both offered high quality food at very reasonable prices... and a few welcome drinks to calm everything down after such a high-flying, high-octane weekend.

ALL the activity venues are within a short distance of the city centre.

■ At the North of England Activity Centre, a package like ours offering clay pigeon shooting, archery and quad bikes costs £44.50 per person for a session of about three hours. There are other packages which also feature off-roading and team building. The 30-acre site has a clubhouse and bookings can be made on 01904-738120. www.noeac.co.uk

■ The Gliding Centre does sessions for non-members, starting at £55. Twenty minutes in a motor glider costs £50. There are group discounts and a one-day experience at £135. Contact the centre on 01904-738694. office@yorkglidingcentre.co.uk

■ At F1 Racing timed practice sessions start at £10 per person for 15 laps. An Italian Job package costs £28.50 per person. Corporate bookings are available and catering can be provided. Details on 01904-673555.



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FAST FOCUS: Sheila gets to grips with four wheels and a rifle

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