

A crisis at the summit

Photo: JAMES FRASER

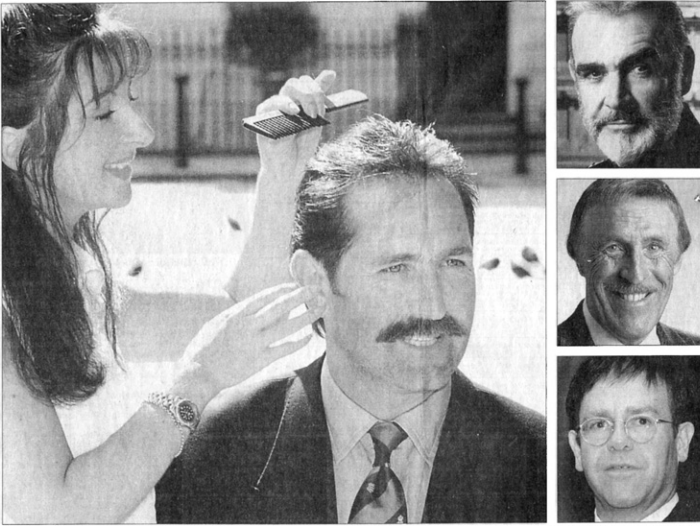
It's tough when a chap is abandoned by his hair. Some, such as Graham Gooch, just go and buy some more. ERIC BAILEY, a fellow-sufferer, examines the roots of a male trauma

I DON'T have a receding hairline. I've just got a bad case of advancing forehead. But I'm not bald; I would be bald if it weren't for the 47 stalwart hairs sticking it out up there like party-goers who don't know when to leave. They may be long, limp and lackadaisical but they stand between me and final humiliation, and I salute them. I treasure them. Er, make that 46 hairs — the sexiest man alive.

I desarey even Graham Gooch rehearsed these truisms as his thick black brushwork turned into a 2B scribble. And I desarey he didn't believe them either — which is why he appeared this week with a patented hearthug on his head, the results of the Strand-by-Strand system developed by the Advanced Hair Studio.

There is no denying it, and Carl A. Howell, the inventor of Strand-by-Strand is man enough to say it: "Anyone who is balding would really rather have a full head of hair." Carl's brown hair is so full and lustrous it looks as if he has had a million dollars-worth of Strand-by-Strand, but in fact he is the only man in his empire — 53 branches from Wagga Wagga to Dallas — who hasn't had any. It's his own stuff alright, so — and he says this with a certain *tristesse* — he can't really know what it's like. He can't really know what a swine baldness is, and that it is among the most finely wrought instruments of nature's torture.

Consider how it happens, according to Keith Hobbs of the Institute of Technology. Male pattern baldness — or "patterning" as they have shorthanded it, perhaps to avoid the b-word — is mostly the



Bald facts: Gooch used Strand-by-Strand while (from top) Sean Connery (in Red October), Bruce Forsyth and Elton John opted for wigs

result of genetic make-up. But it's no good looking at your Dad for a clue: it can skip generations, or even come from your mother's side. And you never know when, how or if the gene is going to pull the rug on you; it can ignore your six brothers and strip you clean.

But, says Keith casually, there is a certain cure for baldness. *What? Gimme!* Yes, he says — have yourself castrated. "Don't ask me how they know, but it's proven that castrated men never go bald." Oh, cheers. This is probably to do with the second precondition for baldness: the hormone testosterone must be present. Ah... so it's true that bald men have gallons of it?

"Well, no... they have no more than anyone else. Even weedy men go bald." The third variable is racial: caucasian patterning generally happens after 35. Afro-Caribbean patterning after 45, and some Red Indian patterning never happens at all, which makes all that scalping seem a shade unfair.

THEN it works like this: on the genetically appointed day — a bad hair day for you, chum — the testosterone sashays up to your scalp, wanders into your hair follicles and mingles with a catalyst known as 5-Alpha Reductase. This becomes Dihydrotestosterone — stuff which should be in Porton Down, not your head — which instructs that particular hair to get shrivelling. And shrivel it does. The only comfort is the hairs don't actually disappear: you, me, Goochie, we still have millions of hairs,

it's just that they are so small and transparent that no one can see them.

"There's no telling either, which hairs Dihydrotestosterone will leave alone, like a thug suddenly tiring of a punch-up; let's see, it must be 45 — no, 44 in my case. But by the age of 50, half of Caucasian men have suffered either the classic Bruce Forsyth receding hairline — the "bilateral recession" — or the Prince Charles monk's tonsure effect from the vertex, or crown. But the testosterone isn't finished with you yet. The final twist of the knife is that as it's laying waste to your scalp, it is gleefully causing hairs to sprout out of just about everywhere else — ears, nose, arms, back, toes. No wonder it drives men to distraction. Only this week Keith had counselled a young man desperate at its effects.

"He phoned me up after I'd seen him. He was virtually crying, just saying please, give me something." But as soon as you go and see Keith, you know that nothing can be given — his own head is a wispy Gobi.

In the Advanced Hair Studio brochure — packed with monochrome "before" portraits of miserable criminals and full colour "after" sex-gods — a reassuring paragraph reasons that having their treatment is no more vain than having your teeth capped or cleaning your shoes. But it's not so: hair equates with sex and power in ways that teeth and shoes do not.

Sean Connery may be the sexiest man alive, but he doesn't go hunt-

ing Red October without getting wiggled first — and why is that if the crusty patriarch in the *Dallas* genre always has a head of silver hair which needs a combine harvester instead of a barber? The link must go back to Samson, but the modern evidence is incontrovertible: when Gooch stepped to the crease this week for the first time in his hearthrug, he scored a century.

To be fair, Gooch's hair looks extremely good, and must now be added to the long dark list we baldies lock mentally away under the heading *Things We Could Do If We Had The Guts*. Carl Howell tells me that Gooch's glory is a very fine membrane made of plastic and set with real colour-matched hair, probably bought from a hirsute Russian. "They're poor so they will sell their hair," he says. "but they also haven't used a lot of dyes and treatments, so it's in good condition."

The membrane is perforated, the remaining real hair is pulled through the holes, and the whole lot is fused down with silicone. But the real hair keeps on falling out of course, so every six weeks or so the client must return to have the gup ropes tightened.

And a wig is a reasonable and reversible solution: Elton John really does look like a rock star again; Bruce would have faltered had he not been to the rugmakers. It's better surely than the Andrew Neil bird's nest, or the Arthur Scargill Shredded Wheat.

It's better than spraying your

head black, as people do. It's attractive in that it doesn't sound painful, unlike the popular Californian wheeze (also on my file) of having a turf cut from the back of the head and sutured on the front. I fear the bloody horror of that one, but also the possibility that when I entered a room, people would think I was leaving.

What people think: that's the real problem. It's why we worry about patterning, but it's also what stops us suddenly appearing in an over-night wig; Carl Howell may insist that people are very understanding, but we know that after they'd been understanding they'd all get together and laugh themselves senseless.

SO THAT leaves three solutions: one, have it all cut short and to hell with it (done that); two, grow what's left long and use industrial-strength gel (doing that); three, grow an enormous moustache which people can't take their eyes off (might do that later).

For the moment, I hang on to one image even more powerful than the one on page 15 of the Advanced Hair Studio brochure (an orange Strand-by-Strander in full Boris-hair, making it into bed with an orange girl. It's of Bobby Charlton in the Seventies, fairly saturated with 5-Alpha Reductase but still firing a high-velocity round into the net, a yard of parcel-string streaming from the back of his head. At least I've got more hair than him. More hairs than him. 45, and counting.