

THE BODY BEAUTIFUL



Lesley Thomas congratulates the Duchess of York on blossoming into a trend-setting beauty icon

I would have been hard to imagine in her twenties – when she was so cruelly described as “the Duchess of Park” – but Sarah Ferguson has become a kind of beauty icon. Swanning about at fashion parties in designer gowns and lunging out with Mr and Mrs Elton John, all svelte and soignée at 46, she is living proof that effort pays off.

I was, very briefly, a royal correspondent in the 1990s and I can tell you that in the flesh, Sarah Ferguson was always one of the best-looking members of the Royal Family – a lovely, wholesome smile and splendid, underrated legs. With her frizzy hair and freckly face, however, she never photographed well, and was unfairly dismissed as the dumpy, ginger one.

Years of following the Weight Watchers points system and American-style grooming methods have paid off, however. Recent pictures of Fergie show that she has joined the ranks of the super-groomed. And last weekend it was suggested that she was a fan of sought-after

American dermatologist Steven Victor, one of the best Botox-ers in the business. It was Victor who introduced botox to Parisiennes, popularising the procedure in Europe. My Budax (like Gaydar, only for cosmetic enhancement rather than sexual orientation) is fairly well timed and I'd be very surprised if Fergie hasn't been helped by some muscle-relaxing injections. Mean-spirited observers on the internet even say she has “flax Brow”, a startled-face condition suffered by those who overdo the Botox.

Still, Victor is the favoured face-fixer of in-the-know pampered party girls such as Jude Jagger and Plum Sykes. It's his association with Fergie, however, that has caused a kitten-heeled stampede to get hold of his very fancy products – recently launched in Britain. Victor, who has been a consultant dermatologist for Clarins and Elizabeth Arden,

knows a thing or two about anti-aging products. “I have pioneered, perfected and delivered some of the most ground-breaking and highly effective skin rejuvenation treatments,” he says. He is, however, discreet on the subject of the Duchess, citing client confidentiality.

A spokesman at Harvey Nichols said the ingredients had “sold well beyond expectations” despite rather high prices. Victor's Bio-Nutritive Luxury Creams promising to “reduce the volume of wrinkles by 36 per cent” costs £300. If that makes your eyes water, you could always try the Eye Repair Rx for a bargain £150. “People aren't just buying one product,” said the spokesman. “They're buying the whole Steven Victor range.”

Madonna prompted a similar splurge when it emerged she was a fan of Dr Frederic Brand's Lineless Eye Cream (£40; 020 8740 2085).

The actresses from *Desperate Housewives* – who must be on the front line when it comes to fighting age – are also guaranteed to get beauty counter bills

ringing. Both Felicity Huffman and Marcia Cross have said they like L'Oréal and Rusher (for details, call 020 8740 2085), bestowing instant cult status on the brand.

What is it about a celebrity endorsement that gets us reaching for our credit cards? Much as I would trust those who have to look good for a living to find some of the best products available, I would caution against copying them.

Everyone's skin is different. You're just as likely to find something that suits your skin perfectly in Superdrug as you are in a high-end beauty hall. I'd love to think that splashing out on the same moisturiser as Halle Berry would stop the sands of time, but it makes as much sense as showing a picture of her to my hairdresser in the hope that I will walk out of the salon looking like a Bond girl. As hairdressers say when over-challenged, “We're artists, not magicians.”



Groomed: the Duchess of York this month