

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Original Man - how to be a less ordinary gentleman](#)

Lead

Will you go down as one of the most exceptional men in history? If not, it's unlikely that a book will be able to change that - but it can still make for an interesting read, as Simon de Burton discovers...

I walked into the kitchen the other day and caught the tail end of a radio programme about the difference between the 'stars' of today and the stars of yesterday. Who was speaking I don't know, but the presenter's sign-off words seemed to sum up the situation beautifully... "What the world needs now," he said, "is not celebrities, but heroes."

Outstandingly special



It's a thought that chimes with the thinking behind a book just out from publishing house Gestalten, called 'Original Man'. It's not, as the title implies, about the origin of Homo sapiens but editor Patrick Grant's selection of 81, 20th Century men who, by anyone's standards, were (or are) truly, outstandingly special.

Heroes with faults



As journalist and style pundit Nick Sullivan observes in the introduction, they are all 'extraordinary gentleman'. Brilliant human beings, but heroes with faults. And all the better for being imperfect and, in some cases, fatally flawed.

Mixed bag



Indeed, one of the most appealing aspects of this book is that, while there are plenty of names on the list that anyone would recognise, many are more than a little obscure and none is there simply for being handsome, or a great actor, or a great singer. Some, indeed, have such 'characterful' faces that they must have presented a downright challenge for those who photographed them, while the names of others will be unrecognised by many readers who will, undoubtedly, set out to learn more once they have absorbed Grant's summaries of their lives.

Lock up your wives (and daughters)



Alex Higgins, John Cooper Clarke and Alan Clark, for example, might be on the radar of plenty of middle-aged Englishmen - but few 'abroad' will know them for their respective talents of snooker-playing, lewd poetry and, in Clarke's case, for the Lothario's talent that enabled him to bed both the wife and daughter of a High Court Judge in between driving his selection of well-used classic cars through London at illegal speeds.

Artists, heroes, libertines and stylists



In any event, Grant has done a brilliant job of selecting the subjects for this book, which is divided into four easy-to-dip-into sections: 'Artist' (ranging from Andy Warhol to Le Corbusier and Miles Davis); 'Hero' (Adrian Carton de Wiart, Spike Milligan, James Hunt and Rudolf Nureyev, among others); 'Libertine' (James Brown, the aforementioned Alan Clark, Keith Floyd and the famously well-endowed Porfirio Rubirosa) and finally 'Stylist' - including Noel Fielding, Little Richard, Quentin Crisp and Boy George.

Thinking men's heroes



These, you see, are thinking men's heroes and this is certainly a book that deserves to be in your library - not least because I doubt you'll ever again find a publication containing the same 81 people simultaneously.

Photos from the book 'Original Man' © Gestalten 2015

Gallery

