

HOW ROD TAYLOR MUSCLED IN ON HOLLYWOOD

"I've got that good old aggressive Australian spirit and I take no nonsense from anyone," Rod Taylor told James Bradford in Hollywood. Taylor at 44 looks back with Bradford at what made him one of the film colony's most famous hellraisers.

ALMOST 20 years ago, Rod Taylor stepped from a plane onto a sun-drenched Los Angeles airport tarmac. The warmth ended there; inside the terminal the welcome he received was decidedly cool.

He had arrived from Australia to do a screen test in Hollywood.

Taylor described his reception: "It was obvious they were painfully disappointed in what they saw.

"I had won acclaim as an actor in Australia, and I guess they expected a combination of Rock Hudson and Marlon Brando.

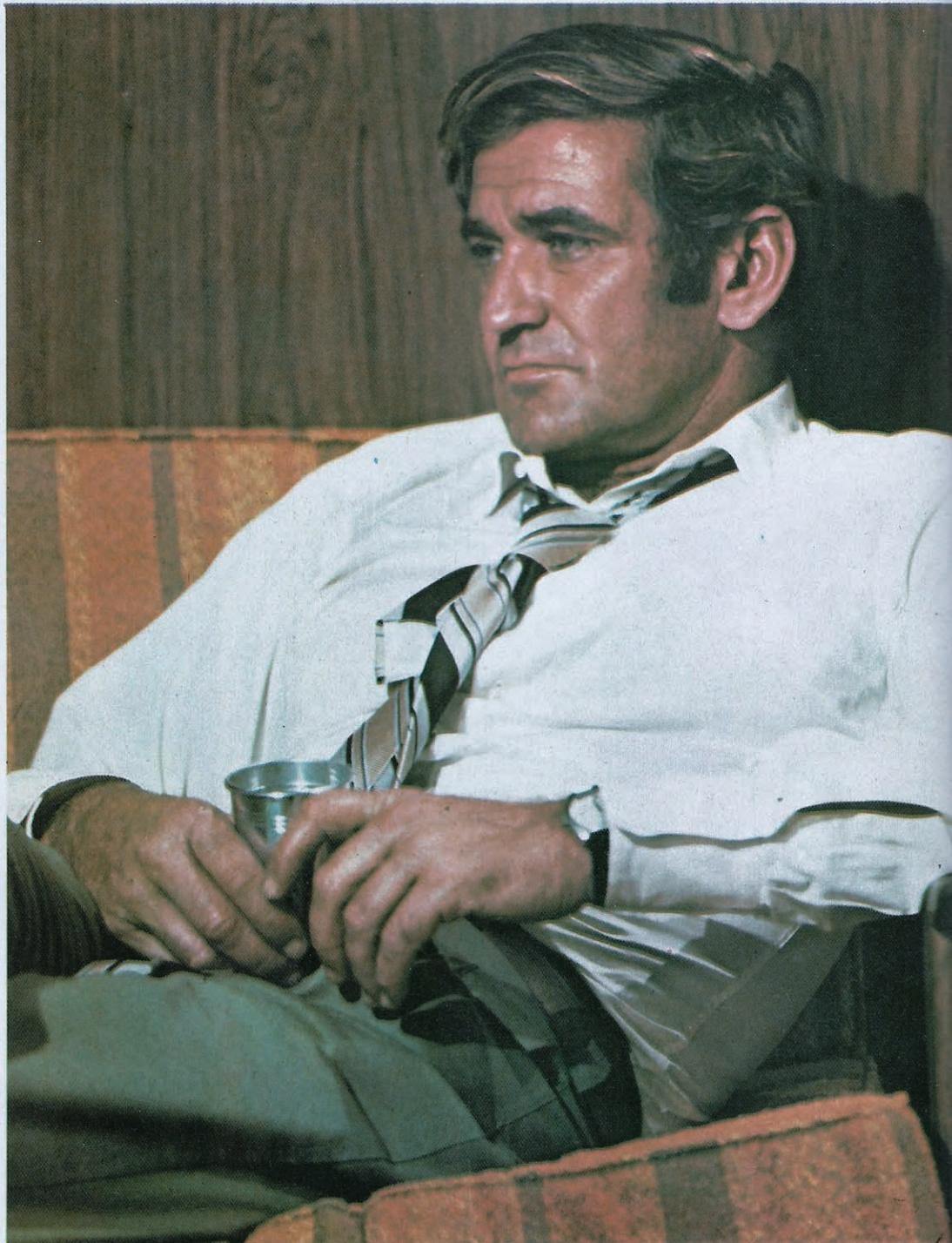
"Instead, there I was in my tight little tweed suit and with the broken nose souvenir from my boxing career.

"I heard one of the group say, 'What in the hell is this?'

"From then on, I was treated like dirt. I was so furious. I thought to myself, 'All right, you rats, I'll show you! You bunch of fatheads, I'll fight.'"

Taylor certainly has fought. His hellraising in Hollywood became legendary.

His battles with studios, his suspensions and turbulent





WITH second wife Mary Hilem, whom he divorced after four years of marriage.

off-screen behaviour were, he said, a by-product of his youth in Australia, when he was "a precocious brat, a punk, a squirt."

Taylor had studied commercial illustration and fine arts at East Sydney Technical College but was expelled — "I didn't wear my hair the right length... I was also too muscular, and in too vulgar a way."

"Whereas I should have been more the pale aesthetic type, I was a ruddy and boisterous bloke."

"I learnt about life at the surf club, and with hoodlums and oafs. I didn't really fit in at art school, and, restless as hell, I played the wag and went to auditions at radio stations, which later got me stage work."

"I started out as a sort of beatnik, painting. I was surrounded by women. I've always been one for broads, booze and brawls."

"But then I also enjoy being with a bunch of real guys, and when I've got a good crew working on a picture with me I feel relaxed. We can play, drink and horse around, and have a good sweat together."

"I've really roughed it and know now how to make the best of it. I guess I got so many rough and tough roles because producers saw me as what I really was — a muscular rowdy type."

Taylor was once described as having "muscles that look like they have been blown up with a bicycle pump, and hands like small boulders," but he is finding that high living is filling out his physique.

He diets, but extra poundage is apparent in his *Trader Horn* and *The Train Robbers* pictures. It worries him.

He said: "The trouble is that I love food. My tastes have

always extended to good living, good food, good wine, and good friends who can spin wild and wonderful yarns."

A diabolical charmer, he is a man whom women of all ages find irresistible; a man men admire for his he-man quality and his ribald, salty wit and personality. John Wayne, his co-star in *The Train Robbers*, said of him: "He is one of the swellest guys I've ever known. A big guy with a big heart. He's my kind of guy and I just love him."

Taylor's long-time friend Glenn Ford said: "He's one hell of a great guy. All heart. A fun guy. A man I am proud to call a friend. He is honest and straightforward."

Since his early days in Hollywood, Taylor has been known as a hellraiser. His capacity for creating mayhem, his wild parties that went on for days and days at the Malibu Beach house he shared with Russ Tamblyn and Jeff Richards, soon had locals labelling him the "Australian Peter O'Toole," and "the new Errol Flynn from Down Under."

SUCH labels only served to infuriate Taylor, and generally people who knew of his low boiling point were careful to avoid mentioning them.

It doesn't take much to arouse the Taylor temper — as Rod Steiger, co-star of *The Heroes*, soon learnt.

According to reports from locations, the two Rods had several clashes, and much the same was said to be happening on the set of Taylor's new film, *The Deadly Trackers*, in which he is teamed with two other hellraisers, Richard Harris and Neville Brand.

But, Taylor told me, his fistcuff brawling days appear behind him. He said his flare-ups now usually do not go beyond fierce bursts of shouting.

Of his temper he said: "While it is quick, it goes just as quickly." It was his temper and

BELOW: Taylor and Georgie Sterling when they were both acting in the ABC radio serial *Blue Hills* in 1954.



his being so outspoken that cost him some prized roles. James Bond was one, Dr Zhivago another.

Of his boozing, Taylor once told me: "When I'm a couple of sheets to the wind — which is very often — I'm free and easy. A few drinks in a man and he communicates better, he reaches out for people, he is more interested in them."

Jack Warner, former head of Warners' Studio, didn't take too kindly to "being reached out to."

Apparently Taylor arrived for a luncheon date with Warner carrying a bottle of wine.

A studio aide warned Taylor to leave the bottle outside, but Taylor ignored him.

Warner glowered at the bottle and then at Taylor, and then with a glimmer of a smile said: "The last guy who had the damned nerve to act like you was another Australian — Errol Flynn."

"I guess you are two of a kind, damn you. I fought with Flynn every day, but I loved the guy. So sit down and enjoy your booze."

These days Taylor tries to cut down on drinking — "At least I don't get so sloshed. I think I've learnt my lesson."

"I'm concentrating more on my work and less on high-jinks. With all my responsibilities, divorce settlements and alimony, I have a healthy respect for work. (He has had two broken marriages. He was married to an Australian model for three years before going to Hollywood and to American model Mary Hilem from 1963 till 1967.)

Regarding women, Taylor has always "lived things up" before, during and after marriage.

He is reported to have had a string of affairs with actresses wherever he went to make pictures.

Like Marlon Brando, he has a fondness for Oriental-type women, and one of his most recent romances was with Carol Kikumura, a beauty from Hawaii. Others included Mai Ti Sing, Nancy Kwan, and France

This is the last in James Bradford's Hellraisers series.



BELOW: Taylor, a painter himself, looks over some pictures.



Nuyen. But one of Taylor's more serious affairs was with a statuesque blonde — the much-publicised Anita Ekberg.

His fling with Anita reached the marriage-announcement stage as they engaged in scenes of torrid kissing in public and wild slapping brawls. Once she was so mad at him that she locked him out of her Rome apartment.

Taylor, so the story goes, was every bit as mad at her, and when loud banging on her door had no effect he ran up to the fifth floor of an adjoining wing of the building and leapt across the chasm onto her balcony.

Once in Italy when he was driving to be with her for her birthday he realised he had come without a gift. So he broke off a road sign reading "20 kilometres to Rome" and gave it to her.

He left Anita because she was "too possessive, too self-centred, too damned spoiled."

When I visited Taylor and

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Mary Hilem after their marriage, he said he had settled down and his fun-filled bachelor days were over.

"I used to get up to all sorts of mischief," he admitted at that time, "and I've had to adjust to settling for a more organised life now.

"I don't have time to go around busting guys on the nose or hopping into some broad's bed.

"I've had a marvellous swinging life. It was fun being with so many luscious dames, but it was a lonely life too.

"Marriage and fatherhood (they had one child, a girl) have won me over."

He didn't stay won for long, and the divorce was bitter.

He told me: "There are so many differences between men and women that a life together in complete harmony is virtually impossible, at least to my way of thinking.

"Mary and I failed to blend on so many matters. Frankly, she became a pain in the neck."

TAYLOR finds his life divided between two homes. One is the spacious, comfortable house he maintains in Beverly Hills (he fought Mary to hold on to that), and the other is the 40ft. fully self-contained "mobile home" which he transports around the world from location to location whenever possible.

His 10-room Beverly Hills home is a rambling, two-storey colonial house which he took years to furnish with rare antiques he restored himself. The walls are hung with his own oil paintings.

He built the lavish wooden bar in the living room, a movie projection room, and supervised landscaping of the garden.

The projection room is like an old English pub, with lanterns, deer heads, spittoons, and lots of brassware.

The main bedroom is an eye-opener — all white and gold with a king-sized bed. Taylor paints whenever he can; mostly figures, portraits, and some abstracts. Among his favourite sports are tennis, archery, golf, swimming and surfing.

He is intrigued with life in general, with a passion for what he thinks is "living."

His "living" includes all the things he has learnt to believe are good — "Music, I love it. Any music. Hunting, especially with a bow and arrow. Reading fiction, usually with an eye to making a film of the book."

I asked him what he expected of life.

He said: "Simple. It's great to be alive, and in good health. As long as you love, work, and have good friends and good wines and food, every day is a ball.

"And for me, much of my success came through my guts and gall. I've got that good old aggressive Australian spirit. I take no nonsense from anyone, and I've got the talent to back it all up.

"I am still somewhat an angry man, still brash. But I have no regrets over anything I've done.

"Although I've been rough, tough, rowdy and have had my fights and quarrels, I don't think I ever really hurt anyone. and that includes all those women in my life — bless 'em all." ■



With Anita Ekberg



With Carol Kikumura