

Forget aches and pains - have a stiff drink instead

How is it that some people can apparently shake off the signs of ageing, while the rest of us are going downhill fast, asks Dick Lumsden

Now don't take this the wrong way... but this month I have become fascinated by a widely published picture of a semi-naked man just weeks shy of his 70th birthday.

The image of Sir Cliff Richard emerging from the sea like Ursula Andress, carrying not one ounce of spare fat, with toned arms and shoulders and rippling abdominal muscles has captured my imagination.

Particularly since I have myself just returned from a sunny seaside break in Spain, where I too, emerged Ursula-like from the sea on several occasions.

Unlike the calendar photograph of Sir Cliff though, I admit I am carrying a few too many ounces (to the extent that when I do my body test on the Wii, the tinny voice actually says 'ouch' when I step on, and the little figure which is supposed to be me pats his stomach and looks very glum indeed).

On Sir Cliff's website there are prominent legal warnings about what may happen if you download pictures which are not for personal use. So I'm going to assume his lawyers might actually read this article, and am therefore not going to speculate too much on the technical aspects of the picture.

I'm just going to marvel at the fact he appears not have a single grey hair on his body - while I on the other hand am 15 years his junior and have a mat of wiry grey hair flowing across my chest.

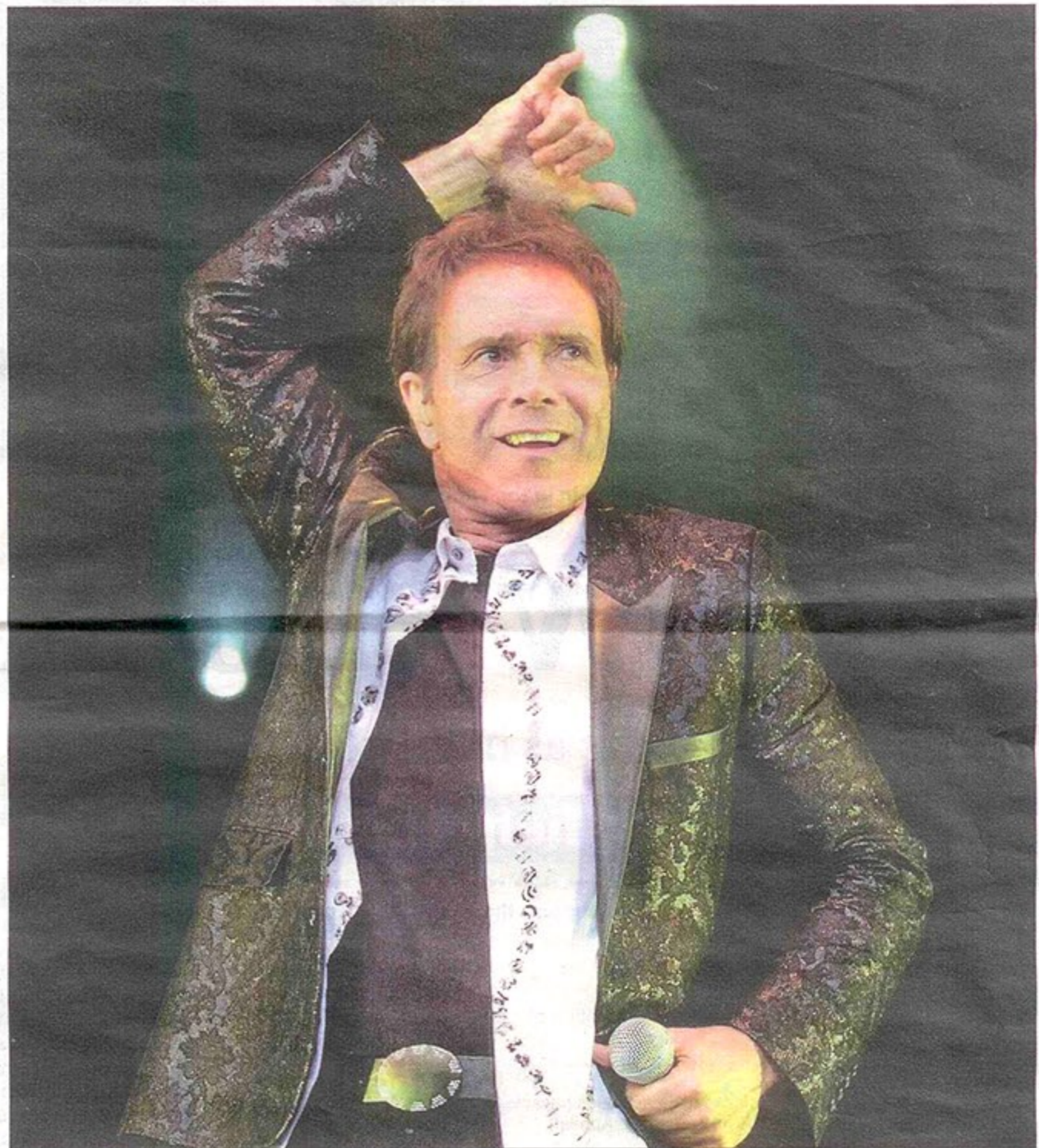
And I'm going to remain silently awestruck that he appears to have the ability to tighten up abdominal muscles, which, for me and most men I know over the age of 50, is a physical impossibility.

There is something the picture can't tell us however... and that is whether Sir Cliff suffers from as many aches and pains as the rest of us do.

Before I reached 40, the only aches or pains I had were the physical knocks suffered in the name of amateur sport and they disappeared as quickly as they came.

But once past 40 I started to notice stiffness in joints that had hitherto been mechanically perfect. Now over 50, the stiffness is accompanied by aches and pains if I sit too long, or stand too long, or bend too long or basically any combination of the above.

Throw in deteriorating



GOOD SHAPE: Sir Cliff Richard is setting the bar high

same effects of a lifetime's wear and tear on joints and muscles. It is inevitable apparently.

How many of you reading this identify with the comic moments every morning when you first get out of bed and walk flat-footed to the bathroom because your ankles appear to have seized up during the night?

And how many of you can still stand on one leg and pull a sock on your other foot without running the risk of toppling over sideways?

So I'm wondering if Sir Cliff, who clearly has the power to ward off some of the visible effects of ageing, manages to keep the aches and pains at bay as well? Or whether he has to sit down to pull on his tennis socks

joints don't creak and groan in the morning I'd be very surprised.

The aches and pains of ageing are caused, quite simply, by normal wear and tear. Cartilage wears out, bones are no longer kept apart in joints and start rubbing together causing stiffness and swelling.

The pharmaceutical industry thrives on this, as we spend billions of pounds each year on medicines and remedies to stave off the worst of the effects. It has been estimated that every single one of us spends, on average, £200 per year on pills and potions.

I admit I was a vitamin sceptic until earlier this year, stubbornly believing that the answer to joint stiffness was to carry on exercising. Exercise is important

now there is a marked difference in my knees, ankles, elbows and shoulders. I know I'm still growing older, but I feel as if I have struck back in some way.

If the pharmaceutical industry could only invent something that can tighten up sagging muscles and prevent weight gain no matter what you eat or drink... we could all be looking like Sir Cliff by the time we're 70.

Dick Lumsden is managing director of Owl Marketing Solutions, one of the few companies specialising in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views on this article, or are