

YOUNG GUN

Hard-hitting Sean Young has fought off the slings and arrows of Hollywood gossip and controversy. On the set of her new film the feisty actress shoots the breeze with Karen Moline



RONALD GRANT

Shimmering under the brutal Arizona desert sun it's lunch break on the set of Sean Young's new film, *Firebirds*, in which she plays a helicopter pilot who teams up with Nicolas Cage to fight drug cartel meanies somewhere in South America. Sauntering over to the food tables – her impossibly long coltish legs and model-thin figure hidden under a drab olive-green jump suit – she picks at some vegetables before downing a huge bowl of chocolate pudding.

Judging from past publicity one might have expected to find the She-Devil of Tinsel Town, the woman sued for \$2 million by *The Boost* co-star James Woods for 'intentional infliction of emotional distress'. That was back in

1989 when Woods and his then fiancée, Sarah Owen, alleged that Young was the kind of woman who sent threatening letters, trampled through Beverly Hills gardens, and was capable of *Fatal Attraction*-type harassment. Clearly something is amiss. The woman sitting here – vivacious and articulate, sexy and intelligent, laughing at her own goofy jokes – is, to put it

bluntly, a bit wacky but absolutely delightful. Perhaps the presence on set of boyfriend, actor Robert Lujan, has kept her enraptured. Perhaps she is pleased with the work in progress. Perhaps all those vicious stories about Sean Young simply weren't true. As to the particulars of the lawsuit that hounded her for more than a year, and which was settled out of court, Young shrugs. It's history. It is also a situation that largely remains a mystery.

Up until 1987 and the filming of *The Boost* – a chronicle of the destructive effects of drug abuse on a 10-year marriage – Young had steadily worked her way through increasingly prominent and well-received roles. Born in 1959, the daughter of two writers, she grew up in the middle-class respectability of Ohio, studied dance and modelled successfully before her Hollywood debut in Bill Murray's 1981 comedy *Stripes*.

That was followed by a stunning performance as Harrison Ford's android lover in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. Roles in *Young Doctors In Love*, *Dune*, and two F Scott Fitzgerald adaptations for television were followed by Oliver Stone's *Wall Street*. But it was her breakthrough performance on the back seat of a limousine in a torrid clinch with Kevin Costner in *No Way Out* that had critics

and audiences calling for more.

When she was hired for *The Boost*, Young was on the threshold of Hollywood's A-list of leading women. She never made it. The emotional trauma of filming was followed by the protracted court case Woods brought against her, attendant media and public gossiping and what resembles a two-year jinx on her career. 'Sean Young,' the stories ran, 'the only actress who has been in more films than she has friends.'

Rumours that she was difficult on set, which had first started during *Wall Street*, surfaced with a vengeance when Young, hired for a coveted role in the much-hyped *Batman*, was replaced by Kim Basinger when she fell off her horse. Not that anyone believed her. Falling off your horse is a Hollywood euphemism for getting fired. But Sean Young really did.

'I fell off my horse and fractured my arm,' she says simply. 'I didn't think it was necessary for me to take riding lessons. Unfortunately, I was afraid of being called difficult at the time – which was another lesson for me. I can't worry about whether people think I'm difficult because they're going to think it anyway.'

Even more gossip was spawned when Young left the set of Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* a week and a half into the shoot. Tess Trueheart, D



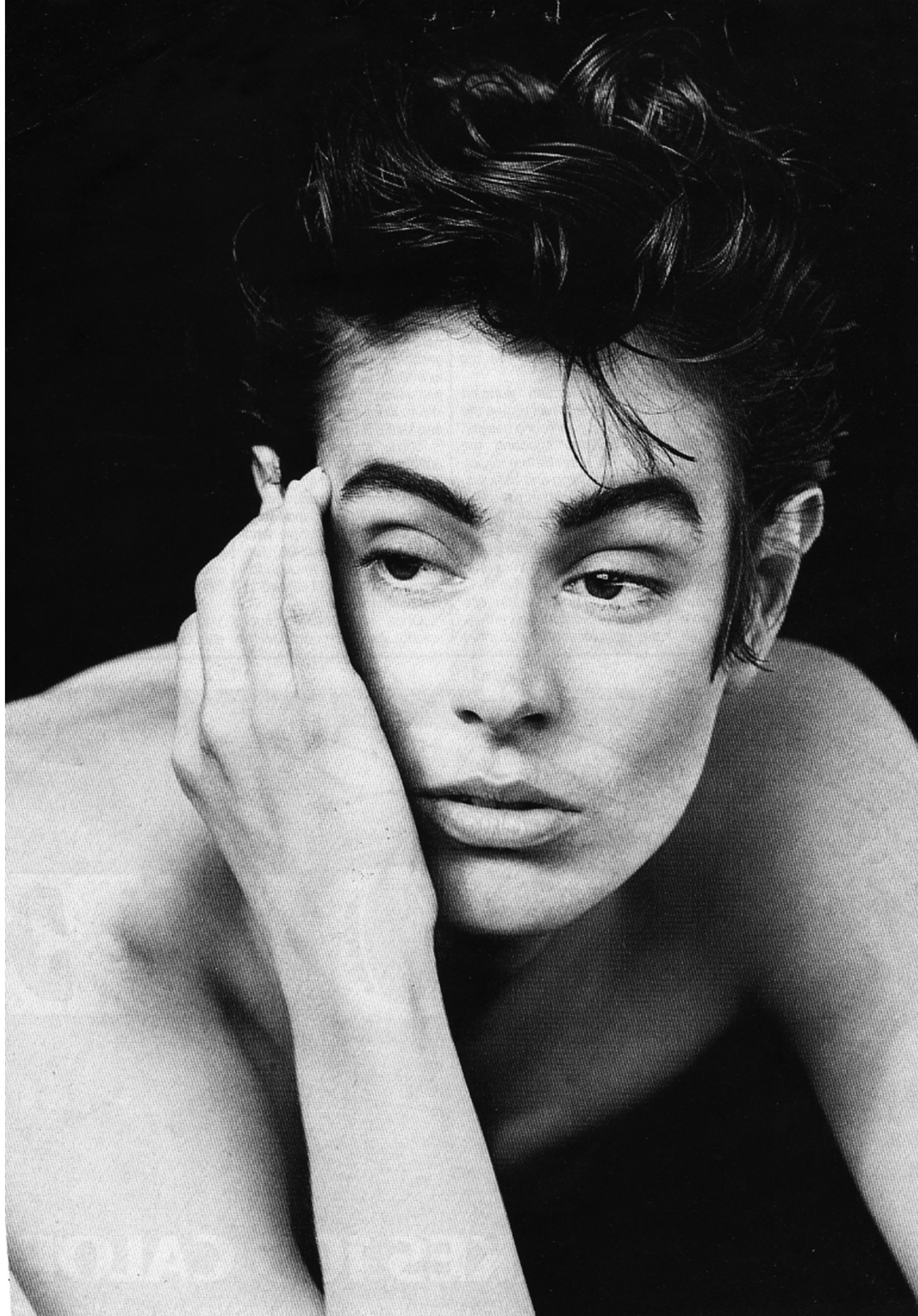
Top, the beautiful android love interest in *Blade Runner*. Above, intense and traumatic, *The Boost* took its toll on Young and co-star James Woods. Below, Young with boyfriend, actor Robert Lujan



D. RIDGERS/LFI

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SEAN YOUNG

No Way Out, right, took Young to the threshold of Hollywood's A-list of leading women — a threshold she never crossed



Tracy's devoted love, was played instead by Glenn Headly. 'Maybe I was wrong but I felt that Warren didn't know how to deal with the fact that he looked more like my dad than my boyfriend. I remember sitting next to him as we were watching the dailies and he hated his close-up. I felt that he was comparing himself with me, which shocked me because he's so much older and I didn't expect it of him.'

It's this kind of bluntness that quickly earns someone the label 'difficult', and while it has kept the gossip columnists employed it has not stopped directors from continuing to hire Young for her acting skills. Nonetheless, her share of disappointments over the last two years could have unnerved even the most secure of people — but her

equanimity remains intact. A cameo in Woody Allen's *Crimes And Misdemeanors* was cut ('Still,' she says, 'it taught me a lot'), and there was the fiasco of Noël Coward's *Present Laughter*. In London and ready to go, Young and Tom Conti found themselves unemployed when Kelly McGillis pulled out and the financing fell apart.

The all-action gung-ho *Firebirds* has turned the tide, and Young has just finished shooting the thriller *A Kiss Before Dying* with Matt Dillon and Max von Sydow. 'My faith in myself is strong,' she says twisting the antique silver ring she wears on her engagement finger, a present Lujan bought her after the riding accident. 'I can't lie. I know I'm a good person. Life is funny. Sometimes I think the only reason all this stuff

happened to me is because I'm the only actress who could deal with it, to turn something that dark into good again.'

The way Young speaks, in all its spontaneous candour, can easily be misconstrued — witness the above declaration of a healthy ego. You would be hard-pressed to find an actor without it, but it is usually put in a less bald-faced way. 'I'm just a nice kind of person and I like to laugh and meet people and that's what this business is for me,' she says. 'If there's anything I do in terms of not working for myself it's that I'm too accessible. I'm uncomfortable being shut off, and I tend to get along with people who don't take themselves too seriously.' Reason enough for her avoidance of Hollywood and the glitz of LA.

'Once you become successful you lose contact with

your humility as well as a certain respect for other people,' she says, outlining a philosophy that has kept her going. 'You can understand why people think distorted thoughts, they get every encouragement to behave egotistically. Power does that to people.'

Power is something that Young has yet to have, although she would like to

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direct something about women's issues. 'Women,' she claims, 'have to stick together, to learn to trust and bond with each other and not be afraid of being called lesbians or letting jealousy creep in. When shooting *Firebirds* I learned how much bonding there is in the army, and how women are actually superior to men when under stress; their reflexes are quick and they have a capacity for endurance and keeping calm when they have to.' One cannot help thinking that it is more than the *Firebirds* experience that has aught her this.

But there remains the chasm — one that keeps Hollywood tongues wagging — between a heated on-set entanglement and Woods' 2 million lawsuit. Logic demands that there be some proof or substantiation of

events. Logic, however, is not an issue when hearts and dreams are trampled.

'The problem was he saw me as the character and not me,' Young says. She stops for a minute and if she's acting during this explanation it's an Oscar performance. 'You go into different personalities when you act,' she pauses. 'But you can't be an actor if you don't leave a bridge for yourself to return, you've got to pave the way so you can always come back and say I'm here, me, outside of this character. When you play an intense character you run the risk of going so far... you don't come back. I fell in love with Jimmy, but I had a road back. I didn't have to act on it. I had enough room to love him in the context of the movie, and keep my relationship with my boyfriend intact. I would tell Robert:

'This is an intense movie; I feel like I've been with my husband for ten years.'

When the movie was over Young and Woods were no longer on speaking terms. 'I tried to call Jimmy and he didn't return my calls. I got it, you know. You don't have to talk to me any more.' Young retreated to the cosy haven of her Greenwich Village apartment on the seventh floor of a non-descript high-rise and took a stab at stand-up comedy at a Manhattan club as a sort of catharsis. 'I felt that if I could survive comedy,' she now laughs, 'I could survive anything.'

She still keeps a low profile — and it's not just a hangover from the Woods saga. 'I'm always anonymous,' she says. 'No one ever recognises me. After *No Way Out* my

image was as a femme fatale and that's certainly not what I look like today.' She still tap dances, writes her journal and practises yoga for relaxation, and is uninterested in the inevitable comparisons between herself and other actresses.

'I'm not on the Meryl Streep list: I don't feel as wealthy in terms of experience,' she says. 'Maybe the Michelle Pfeiffer, Debra Winger, Kim Basinger list — which is not the one I should be on because I really bring a lot to the party. I'm still the discount actress of Hollywood you go to when you want someone good.' She realises what she's just said — the misconstruable ego reasserting itself — throws back her head and laughs. □

The Boost will be released on July 27, and *Firebirds* later in the year.