



## THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

Paul Bint has lived a full life: he's worked as a doctor, seduced beautiful women, stayed in luxury hotels and driven performance cars. But never as himself. Esquire met Britain's most notorious con man, aka King Con, just before his past caught up with him

WORDS *Philip Watson* PHOTOGRAPHS *Simon Roberts*

"KING CON" IS SHOWING ME AROUND a performance car showroom somewhere in Scotland. Looking the part in a blue pinstripe suit he claims cost £3,000 from Versace, a pair of Versace shoes with "18-carat gold buckles", Gieves & Hawkes shirt and tie, Paul Smith cufflinks, Adidas sports watch, Oakley shades and conspicuously carrying his top-of-the-range Nokia mobile phone, iPAQ pocket PC and a copy of the *FT*, he is giving a fair impression of the type of young hotshot who might be in the market for some seriously fast and fashionable wheels.

"I've had two Astons; one of these Lotus Esprit Turbos, in black; a Ferrari Testarossa; one of these Mercedes Sports 500 SLs, but mine was much nicer; a Rolls-Royce Corniche convertible, sky-blue it was; a red Lamborghini; and several Porsches similar to these two," he says, as we stroll past the parade of shiny

sportscars. Mr Con is, of course, talking about the motors he has stolen, and often been caught stealing, rather than those he has paid for with honest readies.

But still, when he casually mentions to the salesman that he works in corporate finance, repeats some of the models he has "owned", and displays a fair degree of knowledge of their specifications and value, you can almost see the salesman's ears prick up and pound signs register in his eyes. King Con is a prospect; in fact, he is so cast-iron and high-profile a prospect that he even comes with his own journalist and photographer.

Settling for a spin in a nearly new, silver-grey, 3.2-litre, six-cylinder, Aston Martin DB7 automatic with Connolly leather seats and a walnut dashboard, retailing at just under £70,000, the master of the universe is asked by the dealer if he knows how to drive the

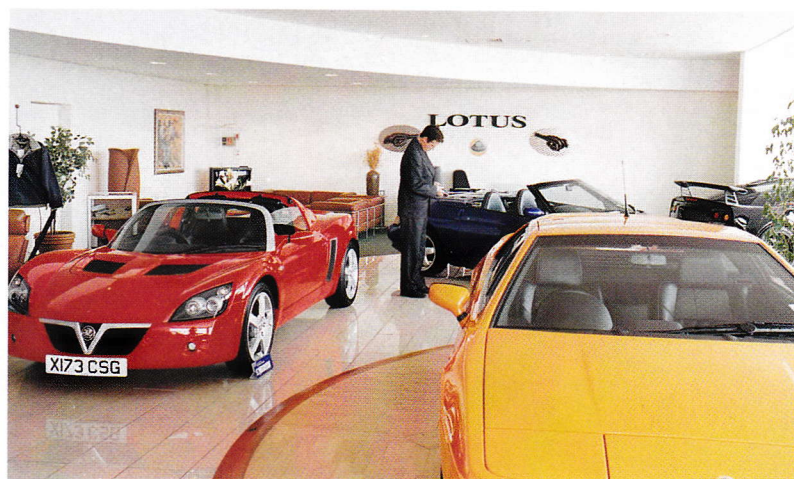
car. "Watch and learn, mate," says King Con, rather too cockily, as he slips into the driver's seat. "I've had every performance car on the road. Once you've driven one Aston Martin, you've driven them all."

He takes the DB7 out for a 30-minute run, during which he very adequately tests its speed and handling and flashes drivers who are in front of him on the dual carriageways ("I hate it when Porsche-owners don't know that they have to give way to class"). The salesman at times looks palpably nervous, yet King Con safely returns the car to the showroom. As we make our excuses and leave, he turns to me conspiratorially and says: "No problem. I know the layout and where he keeps the keys to the cars. Yeah, I could get one off him easy."

A few weeks later, in July last year, repeating a pattern built up over nearly







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**Talking to the operator** Paul Bint, aka King Con, gets into his routine at a car dealership in Scotland, posing as a financier. The lies ran so deep that it was even doubtful there was always someone on the other end of Bint's mobile-phone calls

20 years, he does almost exactly that. Presenting himself to a different showroom, the Anniesland Trade Centre in Glasgow, as James Blenheim, a millionaire who owns a hotel in Mauritius, a nightclub in London and a penthouse in Edinburgh, he steals a £55,000 Aston Martin DB7.

The operation is carried out very smoothly. After supposedly arranging a bankers' draft on the phone, King Con goes to lunch in the car with garage-owner Ross Campbell. Palming the keys, he tells Campbell that he is stepping outside to make a business call. The car is recovered four days later, having done 900 miles and with £15,000 of damage. King Con, whose real name is Paul Bint, is arrested shortly afterwards.

Sales manager John Robertson, who brokered the deal, was later reported to have “fallen apart” when told by his boss that Bint had made off with the Aston Martin. He had been “dancing” in the showroom at the prospect of the commission he would receive. “He was very well dressed and looked like a professional businessman,” said Robertson. “I would have given him the shirt off my back that day.”

**IN THE COLOURFUL ANNALS** of British criminal history there have been few con men as prolific, fascinating and fantastical as Paul Bint. From the age of 18, he has played an ingenious cast of characters, from doctors to barristers, aristocrats, playboys, bankers and ballet dancers, often with disastrous consequences for his victims. Originally a women's hairdresser from Higham Ferrers in Northamptonshire, he has been dubbed “King Con” by the police, and “Britain's cruellest conman” and “most dangerous man” by the tabloids. He has committed more than 120 offences and appeared in court 20 times. He claims to have slept with more than 1,000 women. He makes Jeffrey Archer look honest.

The theft of the Aston Martin in Glasgow was by no means an isolated incident. In fact, stealing cars while posing as an aristocrat or businessman is Bint's most common scam. In 1988, he was sentenced to four years for tricking a salesman out of an £84,000 Ferrari Testarossa while passing himself off as the Earl of Arundel. In other cases, he has made off with expensive cars by pretending to be Pierce Forte, grandson of millionaire Lord Forte, invented

society rich-kid Piers Oppenheimer, and a relative of the Lord Chancellor.

More roguishly, in order to impress, dupe and form relationships with women, he has impersonated a ballet dancer with the Royal Festival Ballet, a Household Cavalry officer and a leading barrister. While posing as eminent QC Lachlan Campbell-Breeden in Edinburgh last year, he ensnared Nikki Gonelli, a former beauty queen whom he impressed with tales of his London mansion and classic-car collection. During the course of their five-week affair, he also presented her with a flashy engagement ring.

His most serious crimes, however, have involved posing as a doctor. In 1983, he was given an 18-month sentence for stealing a doctor's coat and stethoscope at a hospital in Kettering, Northants. A year later, after bluffing his way into the accident and emergency ward of the Whittington Hospital in North London by taking on the identity of Dr Dominic York, whom Bint discovered had gone to work in the US, he went on to do shifts at several other leading London hospitals.

Over a two-month period, he arranged X-rays, attended to a patient with a collapsed lung, and even put 12 stitches in a man with a head wound. At St Bartholomew's hospital in East London, he tried to change the drip on a woman coming round after an emergency operation. At Hammersmith hospital, he was even present during heart by-pass surgery. Caught soon afterwards, he was sentenced in 1984 to five years in prison. “You are not mentally ill,” said Judge Nina Lowry, passing sentence. “You have an unfortunate talent which you have used over and over again to persuade others that your fantasy world exists.”





**“It’s not opportunism. To be a good con man, you’ve got to read up. You’ve got to have a good memory so you can remember what lies you told”**

Eight years later, he was again assuming the identity of doctors after stealing equipment, identity cards, pagers, wallets, credit cards and mobile phones from surgical-theatre changing rooms. In 1993 he was ordered to be detained at Stockton Hall psychiatric hospital near York after acting as a locum doctor at St James’s, Leeds. He wandered the wards wearing a stolen white coat, stethoscope and pager, and donned a surgeon’s gown in the operating-theatre scrubbing-up room.

During the same period, Bint also scammed his way into York District Hospital, where he assured the parents of a 17-year-old girl injured in a road accident that she would live. Six hours later she died. Bint is adamant, however,

that this was a case of mistaken identity and that he has never been to the hospital.

In 1994, he was jailed for five years following incidents at the Royal Preston Hospital, where, posing as a locum named Dr Piers Watkin, he signed a form cross-matching a patient’s blood for surgery and offered to act as an anaesthetist. He was arrested after the hospital became suspicious when his girlfriend, Jane Griffith, called to check that he was bona fide. She had met Bint a few weeks earlier in a nightclub in Preston; she later claimed, somewhat incredulously, that his pick-up routine involved fondling her breasts for signs of lumps while using the line: “Trust me, I’m a doctor.”

At a trial in Newcastle in 2000, during which he was found guilty of obtaining three nights in a luxury hotel in Edinburgh through deception, Bint’s own defence counsel, Eric Elliot, seemed to best sum up his criminal personality. “On the face of it,” he said, “he makes Walter Mitty look like a BBC *Nine O’Clock News* reader.”

**TWO WEEKS BEFORE** our “test drive” in the Aston Martin, I meet Paul Bint for lunch in the swish new Tower Restaurant in Edinburgh. Again, he does his best to act the successful young man about town. He swaggers into the dining room wearing a grey suit by Gianfranco Ferre (he proudly shows me the label), black Oxford brogues (coming apart at the seams) and those Paul Smith cufflinks (squeezed awkwardly through a button-sleeve shirt). His accessories include a Psion Revo Plus organiser, Armani shades, and a TAG Heuer watch obtained, he tells me, “through criminal intelligence”.

“Well, you’ve got to look the part at all times, haven’t you?” he says, passing his Aquascutum cashmere coat to a waitress. “And I’ve got a lot to choose from. I’ve got 80 suits, 25 pairs of shoes, 200 shirts and 400 ties.” The problem with interviewing King Con, of course, is that it’s hard to believe anything he tells you.

Still, we spend the next few hours going through his story. Having been edgy and distracted when I met him for the first time the week before, he seems more relaxed and, as the food, wine and whisky (courtesy, naturally, of *Esquire*) flows, he begins to reveal himself. He is a criminal, but occasionally an articulate one.

“It’s not opportunism; to be a good con man, you’ve got to read up and

research the whole con in detail,” he says as he tucks into a large sirloin steak. “If you’re going to take over someone’s persona, you have to know everything about them and really live that life. You’ve got to have a good memory so you can remember what kind of lies you’ve told. It’s no different really from acting.”

It works, he says, because most people are trusting and take things at face value. “Ninety-nine per cent of people are decent and they believe what they see and what you tell them. They don’t have suspicious minds, there are no hidden agendas, and mostly they will go out of their way to help you. A good con then involves studying each situation and reading people.” He attempts to fix me with a long stare with his cold blue eyes. “Most people are not good at hiding their feelings.”

Detecting some cockney tones in his voice, I ask him if he ever changes his accent. “No, I always talk like I’m talking now,” he replies. “You’ve got to draw the line; you can’t be stupid. It would be too difficult to maintain another accent for a long period – you could easily have a few drinks and let it slip. It’s important to keep control at all times. And anyway, most people with plummy accents are putting it on.”

You sense that part of the reason Bint often fakes it as an aristocrat or double-barrelled barrister is because he holds an intense envy and resentment for the privileged and monied. Having been brought up in modest circumstances – “He comes from a lovely working-class family who lived in a neat little terraced house in Northamptonshire,” says former girlfriend Mandy Schotel – and with modest ambitions, Bint took an early decision to access, however fleetingly, the lifestyle of the Establishment by pretending to be one of them. He is, after all, a very long way from being a latter-day Robin Hood: Bint steals from the rich only to give to himself.

The desire to pose as a doctor is more complex. When he went into hospital at the age of 12 to have an appendix operation, he says the experience was a revelation. “It was like I’d been hit by a bolt of lightning,” says Bint, slowly, emphatically. “Suddenly my eyes opened because I found myself surrounded by people who genuinely cared about me. That was something I’d never, ever really experienced. I was in a family where there wasn’t very much love or



attention.” Like those suffering from Münchhausen Syndrome, he attempted to have himself re-admitted to hospital by pretending to be ill. At other times, he would simply hang around hospital waiting rooms. “It was like a drug to me – I craved that love and care. Hospital made me feel safe. And I think that’s where things started to go wrong.”

When he resolved to become a doctor, Bint claims his mother was discouraging, telling him that he would be better off being realistic and working in a factory, as she and her parents had done. “I said ‘Bollocks to that,’” he says, growing angry. “They thought that just because they were leading a boring, humble existence and didn’t have much money, I should be like that as well. But I wanted more out of life and to build something.”

Pretending to be a doctor gave him exactly that approval and status, albeit in a way that was criminal, recklessly negligent and potentially endangering to life. Bint, predictably, rejects that assessment. He claims that he spent six months poring over medical books and manuals prior to conning his way into hospitals in 1983, and that, having used Dr Dominic York’s name to get a General Medical Council certificate, he actually applied for the position of junior doctor at the Whittington Hospital in London, beating 21 other applicants to the job.

“I had a lot of regard for the patients I dealt with, and everything I did, I did right,” he says. “If I was shown how to do something, I could do it straight away – you’d only need to explain it to me once. It’s all a sequential process, anyway, a series of tests, and if I was in any doubt I’d always ask and pass the patient on to someone more senior.”

But what gives him, I ask, the right to play God with people’s lives? “There isn’t any real justification, but I was certainly a lot more diligent and careful than many doctors I worked with. I helped people on countless occasions and spent a lot of time just talking to people and allaying their fears. Nobody was injured. In fact, there are people walking around today who are alive because of me.”

**BUILDING A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE** of Paul Bint is no easy task. In some ways, when you spend time with him, blagging his way to free haircuts, smoking cigars and chatting up girls in bars and nightclubs, he can almost seem a loveable rogue, an Arthur Daly or Delboy Trotter

figure without quite as much charm and charisma. There is something of the spiv about King Con, yet his role-playing goes much further than simply acting the flash chancer at the bar impressing his mates. “Because I’ve been so good at what I do, I sincerely believe 100 per cent that I am the person I’m pretending to be,” he says. “And I believe that for weeks and weeks and weeks. And as far as ‘Paul Bint’ is concerned, he doesn’t even exist.”

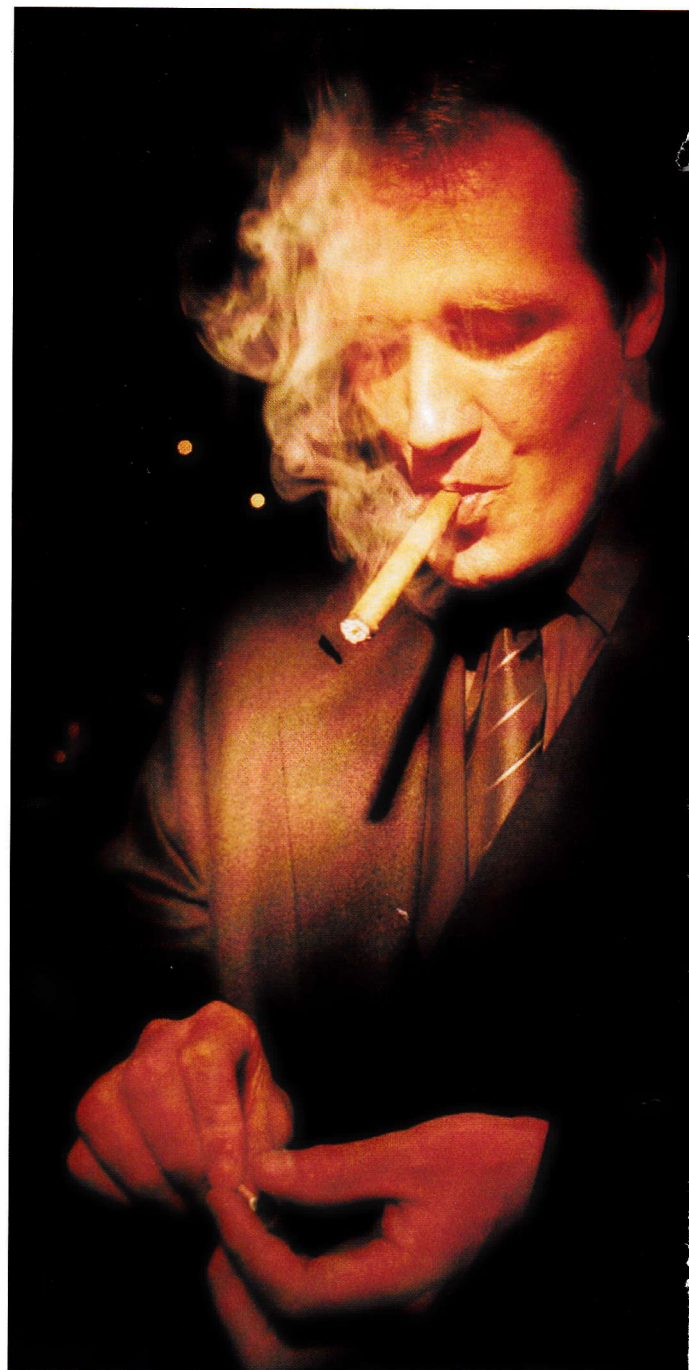
The roots of his deceptions are also much more opaque. He says that his parents separated when he was eight, his mother later moved in with another man, and that from the age of 13 to 18 he was placed in a children’s home, Rockingham Dean in Kettering, and there is evidence to suggest all these things are true. He says that, even though he was gifted at rugby, cricket and squash and played for his county, his parents never supported or encouraged him.

He also says that his father, Michael, ran a successful building company. However, in 1984 Bint Sr was reported by the *Daily Mail* to be living “in one filthy room in a North London dosshouse”. Mandy Schotel, who was Paul Bint’s first serious girlfriend and herself a victim of his cons, confirms that “by the time I met Paul in 1982, his father had left home and was living in a squat in Finsbury Park. He didn’t have a job and I think Paul was ashamed of him.” Bint claims his father committed suicide on Christmas Day, 1993. Other details of his early years, as alleged by him, are often wildly improbable or wholly unprintable. His

**“My parents thought that just because they were leading a boring, humble existence, I should be like that. But I wanted more out of life”**

mother, Carol, has resolutely refused to talk about him and declined to be interviewed for this investigation.

“It’s not so important that everything he reports about his childhood is factually accurate,” says Dr Raymond F Travers, a consultant forensic psychiatrist at the Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust, who specialises in treating criminals with personality disorders. “If his perception of his childhood is that it was hostile, or



that he was rejected, or that it caused him harm, then, even if it didn’t happen, it can have a major impact on him.”

It is clear that Paul Bint’s fantasy life started early in his teens. Unable to cope with the perceived rejection of his family, he found it easier to fabricate a dream life in which he was far more successful and established. “He has never come to terms with his own ordinariness,” says Mandy Schotel. His fantasy life is about escape and control, and the longer he has done it, and the more validation – social, sexual and financial – he has enjoyed, the more King Con has to lose by not continuing to do it.

“If he doesn’t assume these roles then he is a nobody, a non-entity with no fantastic way of avoiding underlying feelings of inadequacy, vulnerability and low self-esteem,” says Dr Travers. “Over





#### Man of wealth and taste

Bint set great store by his clothes: "You've got to look the part, haven't you?" he said. The TAG Heuer watch came his way through "criminal intelligence". He also claimed to carry large amounts of cash at all times: "Got any cash on you? Well, I've got two grand"

time, whereas the people he pretends to be may become more and more sophisticated and elaborate, the other part of him, the real person behind the role, has less and less time to develop and mature. In many ways, he is still a seriously angry and raging child. If he had to live with himself, it would cause him acute anxiety, so it's better to put it out of his mind."

Following a suicide attempt while awaiting sentence in 1984 (during which he tried to hang himself and was cut down, clinically dead, and resuscitated), Bint has been the subject of countless psychiatric reports, and been sent for psychiatric care and counselling. But he claims always to have conned counsellors by telling them what they wanted to hear, and has often absconded. "Talking about things is overrated," he says. "The best way to deal with terrible things is just to forget them, to cut them out like a cancer."

The tragedy of Paul Bint is that he is sane and self-aware enough to know that he is only conning himself. He understands that inherent in his cons is the knowledge they will always catch up with him, that they are self-destructive. He knows his

scams are selfish and self-gratifying, but justifies them as "crimes of intellect, not violence and intimidation". And he knows that, had he chosen a different path, he may well have been bright enough, and by some accounts caring enough, to have actually become a doctor.

At the end of our long lunch, Bint decides to show me a letter, written on his Psion but never sent, to Mandy Schotel, who he says is the one true love of his life. Its sentiments sound a little too pat and practised, but he appears sincere. Part of the letter reads, "I got lost somewhere along the way and the truth is I'm still lost. I've been so many people that I don't know who I am anymore. I don't even remember who Paul Bint is. Sometimes people experience such awful things that they spend their entire lives running away from those experiences. We paint our own pictures of life because sometimes the reality is so painful. And I am guilty of that."

**HE IS ALSO GUILTY** of causing considerable emotional harm to his many female victims. While he is not as good-looking as he thinks (although he bears a passing

resemblance to the McGann clan of acting brothers), dyes his hair, and claims he is 35 years old (39 would be closer), King Con does seem to have a fair degree of success with women.

Some of it can be dismissed as part of his advanced fantasy life. At one point during a night on the town with Bint, he encapsulated his macho appeal as "King Con, King Dong", and quoted me a favourite pick-up line: "It took one finger to get you over here. Just imagine what I could do with the other four." But the cuttings are also littered with tales of women he has impressed and conned using one of his many aliases, women he moved in with and abused financially and devastated emotionally (although a few, it must be said, have subsequently sold their stories to the tabloids).

One such victim, an intelligent career woman in her early thirties whom I'll call Kate, was involved in a relationship with Bint during the summer of 2001. After meeting him in a bar in Edinburgh, for four weeks she believed that she was dating a mergers and acquisitions manager named Richard Campbell-Breden, who worked at investment banking firm Goldman



Sachs in London but who spent time on business in Edinburgh. Campbell-Breeden exists, but he is in fact Managing Director of Goldman Sachs.

Although he often stayed at Kate's flat and began to keep clothes and personal belongings there, Bint told her that he owned a large flat in London, a converted warehouse in Leith, Edinburgh, and had access to a property in George Street, Edinburgh, owned by his father, who he said was the judge in the Jill Dando case. He drove a Porsche and a Jag. He said he had booked a holiday in the Turks and Caicos islands in the Caribbean and was pressing her to go with him, all expenses paid. Bint told her he had been offered a job in New York, where he claimed to have worked for seven years, and wanted her to go with him. He tried to persuade her to give him £5,000 for an offshore investment he was setting up, promising her an instant return of six times that sum.

I spoke to Kate soon after she had discovered Bint was a fraud, and just a couple of weeks before he was arrested. "It's been very upsetting and a struggle to cope with because I would like to class myself as a pretty intelligent lady, but I was really taken in by this guy, this man who's now a complete stranger," she said. "He was very full-on, very attentive, very caring and considerate. I'm not materialistic, and none of the money, properties and whatever mattered, but he made me feel very special."

She explained that, once she had come to terms with the shock, her emotions hardened and turned to anger. "I trusted him so much and I've been hurt badly; now I hate him with a vengeance," she said. "I'm sure deep down he's not a vindictive person. He was intelligent, very affectionate physically, and he had a real gentle side to him. But he was very cynical and calculating, and although I'm pretty resilient, I'm now really struggling to trust people. He's destroyed my faith in people and I know it sounds melodramatic but I think it will be with me for the rest of my life. And it sickens me that when he's released, he will do it again – he will wreck the lives of more innocent, unsuspecting women."

Kate was suspicious of Bint's claims from the time she met him, and eventually

exposed him when she phoned Goldman Sachs to check the mobile-phone number he had given her, so she is quick to state that he was not exactly a master of deception. Although Bint prides himself on his memory and appearance, there were inconsistencies in the facts he told Kate and she thought the quality of his accent, nails and teeth poor for someone supposedly so affluent.

Throughout my time with him, it was hard not to notice the odd slip, the kind of "tells" that poker players often look for in order to ascertain when an opponent is bluffing. Bint pronounced coup with a superfluous "p", and managed to make

**PAUL BINT CAME TO TRIAL**, for stealing the £55,000 Aston Martin DB7, at Glasgow sheriff court in November last year. Alleging he was the "fall guy and patsy" in a £100,000 insurance scam set up by the owner of the garage and a Turkish businessman named Metmah Abdullah Mohammed (or "Mr Met", as Bint knew him), he also tried to con the court by stating he was a manager at Beluga's nightclub in Edinburgh, a claim quickly disproved by staff there.

It took the jury just 20 minutes to find him guilty, after which he even disputed two of his previous convictions, only to have the prosecution prove he was lying by producing fingerprint evidence. He was sentenced to two years, nine months.

During the trial it emerged that Bint had stolen the car to impress women he was seeing at the time. "I was involved in relationships with about four or five

women," Bint

told the court. "It was quite difficult because I was also living with one woman. I occasionally sent the wrong text message to the wrong person."

"He was like a big lump of solid confidence," said nurse Andrea McLaren, who, like Kate, knew Bint as Richard Campbell-Breeden.

"He had an answer for absolutely everything and you couldn't give him a red neck with a blow torch."

Appealing to the sheriff to send Bint for psychiatric reports, a plea that was quickly rejected, Bint's own lawyer, Joe Beltrami, said: "My client is suffering from a psychotic depressive condition. Press reports called him 'King Con' and one newspaper even superimposed a picture of a crown on his head. They should have imposed a dunce's cap with the 'D' emblazoned for all to see."

Outside the court, an Edinburgh detective, who had previously worked on cases involving Bint, said he considered the con man's whole life to be a lie. "I don't think he told the truth at any time in court," said the detective. "But he makes for a pretty hopeless con man because he gets caught all the time and has gained nothing from his deceptions. He only has the suit he stands up in." It was a £3,000 suit from Versace. **3**



**"I was involved with four or five women. It was quite difficult. I occasionally sent the wrong text message to the wrong person"**

## Paper roses

Cuttings from the 'Daily Mail', 1 July 2000, featuring Bint's former "girlfriends" Nikki Gonelli, Jane Griffith and Mandy Schotel, and from the 'News of the World', 15 August 1999, focusing on his exploits in the world of medicine

Louis Vuitton sound closer to "Low-ise Vi-tu-on". His drink of choice was Baileys on ice. His ears are pierced. Although he claimed to have so many clothes, he often wore the same item twice. The £3,000 Versace suit he boasted of turned out, when we eventually managed to get him to take it off, to have been made by William Anderson & Sons, George Street, Edinburgh, and was second-hand.

Yet it didn't seem to matter to him if others believed him as long as he believed it himself. "He's told so many different people so many different stories that he's got in a muddle and he trips himself up big-time," said Kate. "He's meant to be a super con man and fraudster, but he's not a very good one as far as I'm concerned."