

# "AERO-DYNAMIC"

*AEROSMITH were the hottest band in America in October of 1976. The brilliant 'Rocks' album was breaking all sales records and the band's live shows were incendiary. English journalist Chris Welch flew to the States back then to meet 28-year-old frontman STEVEN TYLER at his lakeside home in New Hampshire and came away with this fascinating insight into a band at the height of its powers...*



## HOWARD BUNKER LOOKED DOWN

at his instrument panel and spoke softly into the radio. There was no point in looking through the plexiglass canopy, for all around was a milky grey world, the disorientating confines of a cloud belt that clung like fog to the six-seater, twin-engined Cessna.

Mr. Bunker – silver-haired, with a confident, affable manner – used to fly President Kennedy from Boston, the city we had left in driving rain half an hour earlier. I suddenly felt like Ginger in the book *Biggles Flies North*, heading for the Canadian badlands, liable to be called upon to climb out of the cabin into the slipstream and hurl a can of bully beef at pursuing aircraft.

We were not going as far as the Canadian border, however, but to New Hampshire for a rendezvous with America's highest flying band. The plane began to lose height, and we went into a steep bank. My stomach heaved and a bottle of beer slipped from my fingers.

Miraculously the world returned

as we dipped below the cloud cover. Below us spread a breathtaking view. A mountain loomed directly beneath us, dark and menacing in the afternoon light, while stretching away to the horizon lay mile after mile of copper gold maple trees, a vista broken by the waters of Lake Sunapee.

"That's where we land!" shouted Bunker, twisting around in his seat, and pointing towards a tiny private landing strip on a golf course amidst the trees. The co-pilot adjusted instruments, we circuited the area, then lined up for a final approach.

As the motors died away we flashed over a knot of people gathered around waiting cars. Unmistakable amongst them, waving a greeting, was Steven Tyler, lead singer with Aerosmith and newest source of fascination for the rock-hungry youth of a brace of nations.

We taxied back down the runway. Steven pulled a red riding hood over his head and leaned up against a bright red 120mph Porsche. He looked every inch the rock and





**"GOT A NICE CAR. NICE HOUSE. GOT SOME NICE NEW FRIENDS. MET A LOT OF PEOPLE. SIX MILLION ON THIS LAST TOUR. BUT YOU HEAR STORIES ABOUT GUYS GETTING EGO TRIPS. I DON'T WANNA BE LIKE THAT."**



roll superstar as he moved cautiously toward the new arrivals in the land where Indians once roamed and the geese still fly.

**AEROSMITH ARE** a remarkable band. They are the first American group to successfully adopt the stance of those English bands who have dominated world markets for a decade. Led Zeppelin, Yes, ELP and Queen: we have seen them climb from obscurity to fame and riches. It could only be a matter of time before America would strike back.

Aerosmith have been berated in the States for their English approach, for the obvious influences at work in their brand of heavy rock. It is possible to detect both Yardbird and Zeppelin nuances, but this is hardly surprising as Aerosmith are confirmed anglophiles, and Steven Tyler has idolised the Beatles, Stones and

Yardbirds since he was a childhood fan. Even now he does not conceal his hero-worship of Mick Jagger.

But the critics' assault on Aerosmith did not sway the fans. As the band slogged around on endless tours, supporting many a British act on their way, they gradually built a following. After four years, they have become a record-smashing band – at home, that is. They remain virtually unknown in the land that provided them with so much inspiration.

They have had four platinum albums, which means a million sales each in American terms, and two of the albums have sold nearly two million each. All their albums are still selling around 10-15,000 copies a week and Aerosmith is the strongest-selling catalogue on the CBS label. "I'd like to know why," says their softly spoken manager David Krebs drily. "I still haven't figured it out."

Krebs is quietly delighted by the success of Aerosmith.

He began his career as an agent at the giant MCA organisation and later went into management, handling the New York Dolls. Today he manages Aerosmith, Mahogany Rush, Elliott Murphy and the heavy metal guitar hero, Ted Nugent. He fends off heart attacks and ulcers by retaining a composure that conceals his dislike of flying and rock and roll tantrums. His philosophy is that even the highest paid rock star should be encouraged to be an adult. Beneath the calm exterior there's a determined streak.



**AEROSMITH** start their first British tour in Liverpool on October 13, marking the climax of a remarkable year. They recently played to an estimated crowd of 80,000 at Pontiac Stadium in Michigan.

Their first album 'Aerosmith' was released in 1973 (a year later in England), followed by 'Get Your Wings' (1974), 'Toys In The Attic' (1975) and 'Rocks' (1976). The band was formed in 1970 but did not sign to CBS until 1972. Their work has remained largely unplayed and unknown in Britain until this year.

In the States they have built up their reputation on the exciting guitar work of Joe Perry and Brad Whitford, and the extraordinary stage presence of Tyler, who can leap a full six feet in the air with one gymnastic bound, and whose looks have been compared to both Mick Jagger and Freddie Mercury, a somewhat fearsome combination.

He has earned some notoriety as a wrecker of hotel rooms, a small guy with a big temper, liable to explode with impatience. As Steven drove me to his lakeside home through the beautiful New Hampshire countryside last week, with his pretty girlfriend, I awaited the first signs of madness. Instead he put the Everly Brothers on the tape player: "Weren't they good?"

In his red jerkin and tights he resembles a character from a Brueghel painting, a 15th century European with the fierce speech of a Harlem hipster. And yet he seemed to want to share his experience, to talk about his peculiar situation, a college drop-out loaded with fame, money, and responsibilities. People often like to hammer home the 'ordinary' qualities of rock stars. They are rarely ordinary except for the dull-witted and untalented. Steven Tyler cannot be ordinary, except for a few seconds. He is shaped by his experiences and opportunities. Filled with nervous tension, conceits, aggression, and an overriding boyish enthusiasm that flares up and dies away like the one-man firework display he devised as darkness fell on Lake Sunapee.

**WE ARRIVED** at the wooden house surveyed by electronic security devices, where he is living until a new



home is built nearby. Straightaway he led us to a powerful motorboat moored inside the boathouse and, joined by Steven's old friend Bobby Womack, we were off with a roar across the deserted lake. Bobby's wife hid from the spray beneath a blanket as we hit around 40 miles an hour and Steve casually flipped the speedboat around the islet. His hair streamed in the wind and he gazed moodily into the sunset. Conversation was impossible. Back on land Steven took me on a guided tour of an old yacht club that he is to convert into a mansion fit for a star. "I'm having stone flown over – from Belgium," he revealed. "We're gonna have a rope bridge across to that islet, and we're gonna have a solarium on the roof..." He showed me an extraordinary collection of magazines and pictures from the golden age of British rock, publications designed to welcome to America such pioneers as the Stones, Beatles and Yardbirds in the early '60s.

As a kid Steven once rushed up alongside Mick Jagger in the street to have his picture taken beside him. Last week, Tyler enjoyed his first proper meeting with his idol and they discussed together the perils and pains of stardom. Steven also showed me his collection of guns, the real thing, as used in Vietnam, and on the streets of New York and Detroit when the mood takes the local inhabitants. I held one vicious, long-barrelled monster. It looked like a toy. While Bobby Womack went upstairs to rap with the house guests, Steven and I sat in the