



*Galactic cowboy, Armani model and soon-to-be Disney prince. It's easy to see why **Chris Pine** has cornered the market in all-American heroes. **Annabel Brog** meets the cerebral action man*

Photography **Tomo Brejc**

I am in a suite in London's Corinthia Hotel trying to read Chris Pine's mind. I do not mean metaphorically; I am quite literally attempting to use Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) on him. NLP is a method of analysing someone's body language and speech patterns in order to communicate with them more easily (or, in the case of police interrogators, to tell if they're lying). I learned it once on a journalism training day, and I'm using it now to try to bond with a surprisingly nervous action hero.

We are perched either side of a table, and Pine is pressed so far back in his chair I think it might topple over. He's taking a long time to respond to questions, which, I think, is a way of managing a scenario he finds excruciating.

A couple of times - specifically when asked to analyse himself - he becomes wary, heading me off with a frus-

trated: 'I don't know, I really can't answer that question.'

'Well what do you want me to ask you?' I ask desperately, after this happens a second time.

'I find interviews so difficult that I couldn't say, really,' he replies evenly, and eyeballs me. At least he's honest.

And so, the NLP. Useful in theory, difficult in practice. Who has the time, during an interview, to work out if someone responds best to what they see, what they hear, or what they feel? Well me, apparently, when the interview includes long silences. And I notice that Pine looks down before he speaks, his words are slow and measured and, asked to describe anything, he does so in terms of how he feels. Pine, I conclude, falls into the NLP category of being 'kinaesthetic' (less than a fifth of people are, and I'm not one of them), which means he computes things through his bodily sensations and feelings.

For instance, when he describes his house, which he has been designing for the past year, it's not in terms of aesthetic. 'It's comfortable. It's warm. It immediately lets me relax; it creates a particular mood for me,' he says. 'It reminds me of certain things about my childhood. It's a good place to go.' He's the same about his cars: 'I like the handling of [the sports car], that you have control of the wheel, the power steering doesn't take over. The [people carrier] is wonderfully comfortable. I'm sensitive to things, so if I'm going to be sitting in something for long periods of time, I'd better enjoy it.'

Once I have the kinaesthetic thing nailed, and change tack accordingly, we're on a roll. I ask how he feels about things, Pine answers in terms of his feelings, and the conversation expands. Thank god.

It's hard, before meeting him, not to form assumptions about Chris Pine. First, there are the roles that have made him famous, from cocky renegade Starship Enterprise Captain Jim Kirk in the updated *Star Trek* films, to CIA operative in the rebooted *Jack Ryan* franchise. Second, just take a look at the guy: aqua eyes, button nose, rosebud lips, perfect teeth, ripped body. He's a timeless pin-up in the vein of Newman, Redford or Pitt. (Pine feels the latter has embraced the professional opportunities offered by ageing: 'Someone like Brad Pitt is so great looking that I think, for him, it was probably a hindrance in the early part of his career, though as he's got older you've been able to see how he got out of it.')

But anyone expecting Pine to be just another pretty boy actor is going to be surprised. Sure, he fits the stereotype in some ways. When he arrives at the ELLE shoot, almost comatose with jet lag, he downs a double flat white >

This page: Cotton and cashmere shirt, Giorgio Armani
Opposite, top: Cotton and cashmere top, linen trousers, and leather and raffia shoes, all Giorgio Armani
Opposite, bottom: Cotton and cashmere shirt, and linen trousers, both as before. Gold ring, David Yurman

HERO

THE RELUCTANT

and roars: 'Oh yeah. Bring it home!' in the most gratifyingly frat-boy manner (Pine is 33, although he looks 24, greying beard notwithstanding). Growing up, *Top Gun* was one of his favourite films. He actually says: 'Pshaw!' to express disbelief. I've never heard that in real life, but the noise Pine makes - a whoosh bouncing around the cavity of his mouth - is unmistakably 'psaw'.

But if Pine looks and sounds like an all-American surfer dude, his brain doesn't follow suit. He's intense. A fair amount of the interview is spent discussing different actors' approaches to Shakespeare: Jude Law, Mark Rylance, Tom Hiddleston... (the 'psaw!' popped out when Pine said he would love to tackle 'the Scottish play', and I told him Michael Fassbender has just wrapped on it). Pine studied Shakespeare for his English degree at Berkeley, but claims he didn't show a natural aptitude: 'I did *Henry V*'s St Crispin's Day speech in a huge outdoor amphitheatre. I remember my acting teacher grilling me because my voice wasn't powerful enough to carry. She would sit in the front row, then she'd sit in the middle and then she'd sit at the top. I had a great deal of fun doing it, but I was no good.' In 2001, he spent a year as an exchange student at Leeds University, during which time he got into the novels of Graham Greene - 'I remember really finding it interesting that he struggled a lot with religion' - and, the day before our interview, he was papped landing in London clutching A. Scott Berg's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of aviator and activist Charles Lindbergh.

When he's relaxed, however, his intellect is tempered with a willingness to laugh at himself. It shows, for instance, when I read out the description of the Armani Code man - Pine is the new face of the fragrance - from the press release, to see how much he feels it reflects the real him.

'A man with impeccable allure, a strong, naturally magnetic personality that attracts attention,' I say.

'That's a really well-crafted sentence,' he deadpans.

'Also: "masterfully elegant",' I add.

'Er... OK.' There is a pause.

'He leaves "a sensual trail in his wake",' I conclude.

Pine grins. 'I don't really understand what that means, but it sounds interesting. Although, "trail" makes me think... [he laughs] maybe that's just the cologne. Look, what can I say to that? I'm very flattered that I was chosen, and if Mr Armani thinks of me that way, it's probably the reason I'm sitting here today, and I'm grateful.'

As well as the print campaign, there is a film advert for the aftershave, during which Pine elegantly descends a flight of stairs. It's a different way of moving to, say, Jack Ryan, who has an all-out action-man running style: chest first, arms pumping, chin up.

'I definitely worked out my run [he grins again]. For sure. I found a guy who is a runner and a triathlete and all kinds



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of stuff, and we talked about the mechanics of it and what your feet should be doing at certain speeds.' Did he, I venture, run around while the trainer filmed him on a phone, to see the most photogenic version? 'I did not do that. No,' then adds, deadpan again: 'But it's a great idea and I wish I had.'

Pine has never yet been called on to play 'ugly' (as in physically - he's had his share of nasty characters) in the manner of Christian Bale, Michael Fassbender or Benedict Cumberbatch. He is so very pretty, he doesn't appear to be able to get away from it in the same way as his contemporaries.

'How you look, it must, it does, define what you get,' he admits. 'You have to push to get certain parts. I did a film called *Smokin' Aces*. And originally the casting director wouldn't see me for the part - a tattooed, redneck hill-billy. I really wanted the part, I pushed for it, I went in and eventually got it. That was definitely one of the big highlights of my career.' Not, you will note, the big-franchise blockbusters he stars in. The high point is scoring a role where he gets to look (kind of) gross.

You can further sense his discomfort with being typecast as a 'leading man' when he talks about his co-stars. Of Keira Knightley, with

whom he worked on this year's *Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit*, he specifically praises her capacity to get away from it all: 'Keira was lovely and so professional. She's really invested in it when she has to be, and then she has a great ability to go home to her husband and enjoy her life'. Similarly, he enjoyed taking something of a back seat to Cumberbatch while promoting the second *Star Trek* film, *Into Darkness*, last year.

'What to say about Benedict? He's a nice man first and foremost. He's just a lovely guy, he's not arrogant. He has a tremendous work ethic. When the film came out, it [the surge in fame] was just starting for him. It's fun to watch a guy like that go on that ride, where people are loving him. I'm so excited for him and anyone who has worked with him would be.'

Later this year, Pine will be seen doing nasty in *Horrible Bosses 2*, then, at the start of 2015, he'll be charming as Cinderella's prince in Disney's adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's *Into The Woods* - 'a beautiful film, lush, and the cast is extraordinary, from Johnny Depp to Meryl Streep.' He has to sing in the film. There was an awful lot of practice involved.

'Oh my god, yeah, I *had* to. It is quite something when you think you are a good singer - and I patted myself on the shoulder many times before I began, thinking, "You got this down, it's fine" - and then you go in a recording booth and the microphone, just like a camera, will pick up bullsh*t a mile away.'

Mics and cameras aren't the only ones. I conclude Mr Pine also has a finely honed BS detector. And I'm right, of course. After all, I can read his mind. ●

Chris Pine is the face of Armani Code