As Sun editor Rebekah Wade marks five years in the paper’s hot seat, Rob McGibbon talks to her friends and peers in a bid to discover the woman behind the headlines, and gauge her impact on Britain’s best-selling daily.

** Putting the breaks on: Wade has held on to a large proportion of readers than The Mirror.**

*Image: The Sun's Band Aid 20 campaign began with reporter Oliver Harvey going to Ethiopia for the 20th anniversary of the original Band Aid single, culminated in a re-release of the million-selling Christmas single in 2005. The Sun was then closely involved with the organisation of the Live 8 concert in July 2006.*

**Hutton Report leaked, 28 January, 2004**

The inquest into the death of Dr David Kelly, the British intelligence officer was held with commendably good humour. "She accepts why the media village loved it and doesn’t think she has any right to be thin-skinned," says one journalist.

People also say that she bounced back from her lowest moment—when she was arrested for that "domestic" with then-husband Ross Kemp in November 2005—with commendably good humour: "She accepts why the media village loved it and it doesn’t think she has any right to be thin-skinned," says one Sun journalist.

But what of The Sun’s personality? Generally, people agree that her paper has more sense of fun, balls and irreverence than it ever did in the humourless Yelland years. Certainly, Piers Morgan is quick to stamp on criticisms of Wade’s style and work ethic. He says: "Most of these people who whinge about her office style are men—mainly old—who don’t like taking orders from a woman. She inherited what was essentially a misogynistic office, but..."
de’s world

she has fought against that. People seem to forget that she is the first woman to do this job. That alone is an incredible achievement.

“It is also complete bollocks that Rebekah is workaholic. I haven’t seen anyone edit the paper more diligently – she lives it seven days a week. People slag her off for networking – but isn’t that what all journalists do? You work your contacts.

“Most of the rich and powerful people she knows would rather swim in boiling oil than talk to The Sun, but by some miracle she wins them round. Every female Fleet Street columnist has her template rejoinder for successful women being castigated as bitches, while their male equivalents are championed for being bastards. They can’t all be wrong, can they? No one spoke to, not even her detractors, think of Wade as a bitch. Maybe we’ll just have to accept she is not one, then? Apologies.

“As much as people want to think of her as a hard-headed bitch, I don’t think she is at all,” says Greenslade. “It is a convenient image. She’s tough, for sure, but she’s not ruthless. She’s also incredibly open and always takes people into her confidence, which wins them over quickly.”

Wade’s closest circle talk of her as a thoughtful and loyal friend who is always there for people when it matters. She is not afraid to show her vulnera-

ble side, not least since her split from Kemp, which is now heading to an “amicable” divorce. One recurring observation is that she is a touch too mannered to her job and is constantly “twitchy”. Blackberry in hand, with the stress of staying on red alert. “I defy anyone who gets to know Rebekah not to like her. She is charming, genuine and great fun,” says Morgan.

There is always some talk about where Wade will go next. Murdoch and Les Hinton will probably decide that, not her. She laughed recently about her editing The Times and said, “I’d rather shoot myself.” She makes no secret of the fact that The Sun is the job in UK newspapers and nothing else appeals. Eventually, somewhere in Murs-

doch’s American empire would seem a natural step.

It has been an exhausting but, on the whole, successful five years for “Rebekah of Wapping”, and she will continue to bask in the extreme heat of Britain’s bestselling daily newspaper for this reason alone: The Sun – she loves it.

Rob McEwen is a freelancejournalist and founder of the new aggregation website www.accessinterviews.com

‘I remember Rebekah’s first splash’


“She was beaming and she was so enthusiastic that it was obvious she was going to climb the greasy pole. I was Kelvin’s (MacKenzie) deputy on The Sun for three years and would have killed to have had the job Rebekah got – editor of The Sun.

“I think she has done brilliantly and has put the fun back in the paper. The paper bags the best exclusives and gets the best headlines.

“Tributes to her in succeeding in a very difficult, competitive world, where she has needed courage for snap-decisions, and where the whole world will see if you cock it up.”

‘She’s done a superb job in a difficult time’

“Any editor that lasts five years on a red top is doing bloody well, especially these days,” says former Daily Mirror editor David Banks. “She’s actually done a superb job in a very difficult time.

“It’s the same for all tabloid editors – you’re in a falling market and you have to hang on to as big a percentage of your readers as you can. It’s like presiding over a flimsy lifeboat that’s plunging over Niagara Falls. She’s hung in there, she’s retained Rupert’s favour – which is no mean task in itself.

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Roy Greenslade, The Guardian

“The Sun’s haul of British Press Awards under Rebekah Wade

Reporters of the year: Oliver Harvey (2006), Trevor Kavanagh (2005)


Financial journalist of the year: Jan King (2005)

Photographer of the year: Terry Richards (2004)


Cartoonist of the year: Bill Caldwell (2005)


The deadline for entries to the 2008 British Press Awards is 23 January. For details go to www.pressgazette.co.uk