I show Vic Reeves a back issue of Press Gazette, so he knows what this interview is about, and he looks surprised. “Why am I on the cover?” he asks. Quickly taking a closer look, he adds: “Er, no. He’s got a wider face, but he’s a dead ringer. Who is it?” “Andy Coulson,” I reply. “Oh, right. Who’s he then?” I’ve clearly been suckered by Reeves’ press because I naturally assumed he would be in the media loop. As one of the country’s most popular comic performers (notwithstanding that excruciating appearance in I’m A Celebrity), he has certainly gathered enough column inches and lugged at enough showbiz parties to be on nodding terms with newspaper figures. Alas, no.

Reeves has also had his share of scandal publicity, principally when his ex-wife, Sarah, dumped him for their builder, then came back, only to leave him again — for a woman. Cue ménage à trois headlines. Ooh là là. And only last year, he got a Mickey Finn from The Sun to help get him busted for drink-driving.

I take Reeves for lunch at The Heights panoramic restaurant at London’s Saint George’s Hotel. He’s talked out from promoting his autobiography and has a stinking cold, caught from one of his twin girls, who arrived last month, thanks to IVF with second wife, Nancy Sorrell. Reeves, 47, has two other children from his first marriage.

His real name is Jim Moir and Vic is Jim to everyone he knows well. He says I can call him Jim, but then I have to constantly correct myself. It should be easy because you don’t get wacky Vic in an interview, you get Jim, who is low-key, a touch short of hard work to interview. Reeves is a Darlington lad who says it straight, without the need for protracted exchanges or showbiz fakery.

You seem to get followed by the paparazzi a fair bit and there’s always a lot of gossip about you in the papers. Is any of that a problem?

They [the papers] tend to completely invent things. When somebody invents a story, it gets taken on by someone else and it doesn’t matter how many times you say “no, that didn’t happen” — it sticks. If the paparazzi are nice, I am nice back. It’s a bit like being a goldfish when you are followed, but as long as they put a decent photo in, it’s all right. But when they start being rude or papers make things up, I don’t think there is any need for it.

A photographer hung around outside the house for about a week a few years ago. He had loads of pictures, but would not go away. I said: “You’re being intrusive, why don’t you clear off?” But he wouldn’t. It was very hot, so I got some rice pudding and chucked it into his car. I thought it would start stinking and he would have to go and clean it. As I threw the tin, he put his hand up and got a tiny nick from it. He squeezed the blood out and took a picture of himself and told the cops I had attacked him with a tin of steel.

In effect, it was an attack, but it was just after Diana was killed, so the paparazzi were not that favoured. I explained the situation to the cops and they were quite happy and said I could go home, but they kept him in overnight. I know he was just doing his job and, with the line of work I am in, you do me a favour and I will do you a favour. I like a nice, peaceful world where everyone gets on. Nancy got five grand once to have pictures taken on a beach with a long lens to look like it was a paparazzi shot, so you can work with them.
The papers dissected your marriage when Sarah left. What was it like having such private matters exposed?

Well, it's not very nice, but, you know, I am very forgiving. It's their job and a tabloid will make people's lives look like a soap opera. I am thick-skinned and I have got more thick-skinned over the years. Michael Caine once said: "Never read your good reviews because then you will start reading your bad reviews and then it will hurt." I don't bother reading the papers when stuff like that is in, but I get told by other people when they see it.

When Sarah cleared off with the builder, they [reporters] kept coming round knocking on the door. I never bothered answering it. Then they were round at Bob's [Mortimer, his sidekick] — I think it was actually Matthew Wright who went — and Bob ran out with a cleaver. The only time it got really upsetting was when the press went to my parents'. They can do it to me, but I don't think they should do that.

After the first time, Sarah knew she had made an error and we got back together. Then she went off with her girlfriend. She is living her life and is doing what she feels is right and what she wants to do, which is fair enough, that's her business. The papers said that I lived in the house with her and her girlfriend, in a ménage à trois. That was ridiculous, I didn't. She didn't live in Folkestone and I lived in Rye. That story was maximum defamation. Things like that will keep appearing because it makes my life seem more adventurous than maybe someone who lives on a council estate in Barnsley.

What is the strangest thing that has happened to you?

Well, it's when I met your mum. I went and met her in London and she was an absolute doll. She and your dad have always been great.