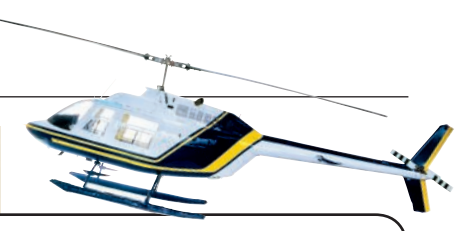
From top: Horse-riding on Costa Rica's Nicoya Peninsula; Lady Hester Stanhope; G&T; a Porsche; The Hall School in Somerset; Moulin Rouge!; swimming with sharks; To Kill A Mockingbird; singer Jackie Wilson; a cheetah



I always wanted to learn to fly a helicopter, but now I probably don't have the reactions or the eyesight!

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's Deborah Meaden of Dragon's Den

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... I was lucky enough to find the gold ring my husband Paul bought me for Christmas in 2005. I took it off during lunch and lost it. I think it got swept away with the table debris. But two years later Paul saw a glint of gold in the veg patch and it was the ring!! Goodness knows how it got there, maybe in the compost?

The unending quest that drives you on... Completing my list of 'Things to Do Before I Die'. Recently in Australia I swam with whale sharks and rounded up cattle on horseback, but I'm always adding new ones.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no time travel restrictions... All day with Paul. We'd wake to birdsong at Sarara Camp in Kenya before climbing a Mayan temple in Guatemala, to watch the sun rise. A walk beside Iguazu falls in Argentina, then lunch at Balthazar, Manhattan. In the afternoon I'd go horse riding on the beach at Costa Rica's Nicoya Peninsula. I'd close a business deal by phone, then celebrate with a gin and tonic on the roof of the Lake Palace Hotel in Udaipur, India. Dinner at our Somerset home with friends and family.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Googling everything. I can spend hours on the internet, learning lots but retaining very little.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee. I read it when I was 12 and found the racial prejudice so shocking.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I don't like eavesdropping or prying, so I'm afraid I'd have to make myself known.

The way fame and fortune has changed you, for better and worse... For better, having a voice to influence change for good. For worse, it is harder to appreciate things once they're easy to come by.

The film you can watch time and time again... Moulin Rouge!, a movie with such amazing visuals and soundtrack, it doesn't matter if you know the ending.

The person who influenced you most... My older sister Gail, who says what needs to be said, whether I like it or not.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Lady Hester Stanhope, niece of William Pitt The Younger. She was his confidante and had adventures in Arabia. I'd like to chat about her unconventional life.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Simply owning money is meaningless – it is the good that you can do with it that really counts.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Cooking. Unlikely, because I haven't cooked a meal in 25 years. Curious, because I am fascinated by the Zen-like trance Paul goes into when he is creating a dish.

The prized possession you value above all others... A paper collage of my cat Willow, who died. It is by the South African artist Peter Clarke and is made from memorabilia such as a postcard of the church where I was married and my Grade 1 piano certificate. It is irreplaceable.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Not taking a gap year and travelling. I left college at 18 and was obsessed with going into business.

The poem that touches your soul... Ozymandias by Percy Shelley. We did it at school and it made me realise poetry wasn't just a bunch of words that sometimes rhymed and sometimes didn't.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I never smile. I smile all the time, but giggling in the Den would be disrespectful.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Being sent to boarding school (the Hall School in Wincanton, Somerset) at seven. It was the first time I felt restricted and I hated it. A year ago I drove past where the school used to be and still felt a sense of dread.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... Driving my Porsche at top speed with the hood down through the Scottish Highlands.

The song that means most to you... Jackie Wilson's Higher And Higher. I played it over and over when I met Paul in the mid-1980s. He didn't complain, so I knew we were going to last.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... In Kenya in 2010, when I saw cheetahs up close for the first time.

The saddest time that shook your world... In 2009 I was sent a video of a dog being skinned alive for its fur. I've never been able to forget it, and it galvanised my position on the fur trade.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To learn to fly a helicopter. I didn't have the time or money when I was younger and now I probably don't have the reactions or the eyesight!

The philosophy that underpins your life... Keep it simple. That way you can get more done.

The order of service at your funeral... Cry a little, laugh a lot, then turn up the music and dance.

The way you want to be remembered... As someone who could laugh at Harry Enfield's 'Grumpy Woman' take on me, cry through Schindler's List and not eat fish for a year to make a point about sustainability.

The Plug... Deborah is an ambassador for WWF UK, which is celebrating 50 years of helping people and nature. Join in at www.wwf.org.uk/50 ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PHOTOGRAPHS: XXXX