

Prince Edward is determined to see his company, Ardent Productions, succeed.

Prince Edward will turn his mind to marriage once Ardent, his film production company, is established. 'I want to concentrate on my career now,' he says emphatically. 'I've got to make sure we have a track record before turning my mind to other things.'

But does he have a date in mind, perhaps in two years time? Edward Windsor – as he is known at work – laughs. 'Ask the commissioning editors.' Last week he said it would be 1996 before he knew whether his business was a success or failure.

We meet in his airy Charlotte Street offices, all grey and cream corporate good taste. There is a video entry-phone at street level and electronic security for the office.

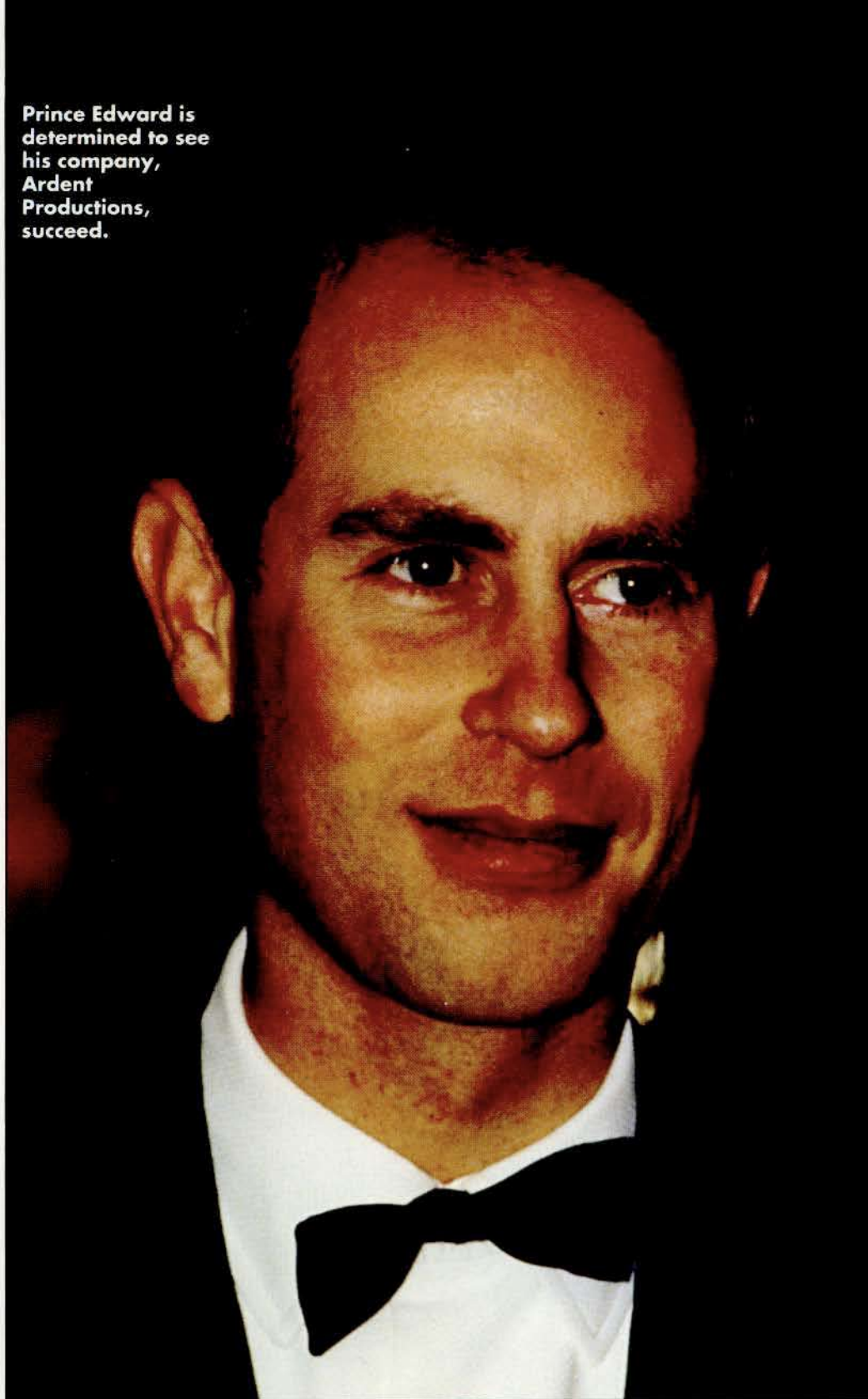
'Sorry, Edward's on the telephone,' says the receptionist, breezily. Fifteen minutes later HRH appears, in black stripy shirt with no jacket, cords, clubby tie, chunky signet ring with 'E' beneath a crown and militarily cropped but thinning hair. He has slight shoulders, a clean-living, kindly face, strong handshake and direct eye contact.

He carries my coffee to his office and apologises profusely. Sorry he's late. Sorry about the short notice for the interview. Sorry about the mess in his office. He starts his tape recorder and appears surprisingly nervous. He exhales after questions, touches his eyebrow, fiddles with his fingers or crosses his arms defensively. I ask how I should address him. 'How would you like to address me?' he laughs.

This is a typical comment from one of the more relaxed Royals. But not everything has been easy for Edward. For example, how did he feel when he was dropped from the Civil List in 1992?

'It was like a kick in the teeth,' he reveals. 'People say, "Oh well, it was deserved, what did you ever do?" But you have only to look at the Court Circular records – the publicity was unbalanced. But once in this particular job, born into it, you can't get rid of it. I still do the same work. Now I have to find other ways to fund my existence.'

Does he pay for any of his charity work ▷



TIM GRAHAM

## ARDENT ADMIRER

Prince Edward's relationship with Sophie Rhys-Jones has made him front page news. He was keen to put the record straight when he talked to *Caroline Phillips*.





privately? 'Yes, I have to. But it's not a satisfactory way of proceeding. It opens up the possibilities of straying beyond what people might regard as right and proper and being susceptible to commercial forces. Before, I was in nobody's pocket.'

What is his response to the monarchy being pushed to justify itself and pay tax? 'It's not a position which the monarchy deserves. But it is far too noble to be drawn into that particular battle.'

Edward is in an impossible position – caught between trying to be an ordinary person and being a Royal. 'I've been living a schizophrenic existence for a very long time,' he says, 'so it's nothing unusual for me.'

Does he really believe he is normal? 'I would never describe myself as quite ordinary or normal,' he replies with a laugh. 'But I don't see myself as removed from the mass of people. I feel I'm part of it. I walk down the streets, I use the roads like everybody else, go into shops and move around town, hopefully without causing any interference to anybody else. We're out there in the community, living and experiencing the lives of – or lives very similar to – a lot of other people.' And has he a detective with him now? 'Yes.'

Edward is accommodating in answering questions he does not wish to discuss. He picks his words carefully, speaking with the same inflection as the Prince of Wales. Often he stops himself, as if to prevent himself saying something indiscreet.

His problem has been his search for a role in life. 'I'm in a slightly more unusual position than most,' he says, 'but I work out both roles in a reasonable way without causing any embarrassment to anybody.'

He had a crisis when he left the Royal Marines, against the wishes of the Duke of Edinburgh. 'It was obviously a traumatic period for anybody – for everybody – and wasn't an easy decision to make.'

He resolved his conflict in the glare of front-page publicity. 'Unfortunately, the media has to be taken into account when making decisions. But you have to be convinced in your own mind that what you're doing is right. I mean, whose life is it?' he asks, heatedly.

If he was not cut out to be a soldier, was he destined to be an actor? 'It might have been a job that I would have liked but it would have been totally impractical.' He laughs, as he does often – sometimes obligingly, to be friendly, and at other times defensively. 'So it really wasn't worth continuing. Production is behind



the scenes. It's quite another thing to be out at the front regularly.'

He is the first child of a British monarch to have entered business. 'It was bound to happen before too long,' he says, mock stoically.

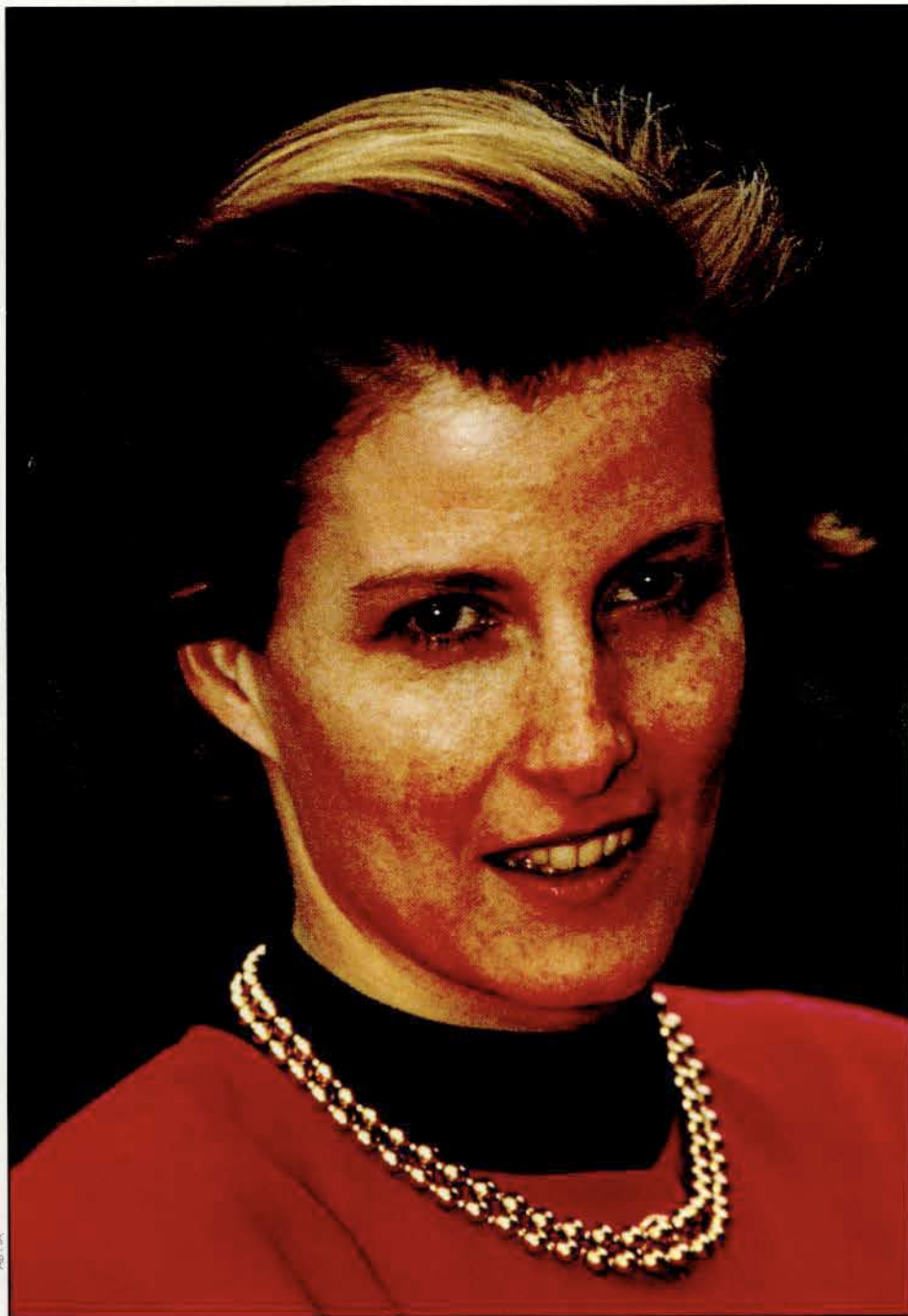
But what qualifies him for the job and what are his strengths and weaknesses? 'My greatest strength and weakness is basically who I am. I can get my foot in the door - but after that I've got to be better than everybody else. There are people out there who are very nervous of commissioning me because of how it might reflect on them.'

He explains that at television parties he walks up to people and says, 'Hi, I'm Edward Windsor.' Most people are perfectly warm. I've been in the market-place long enough for it to be no longer a shock seeing a face out of context.'

Why doesn't he make royal programmes? 'That would give the wrong impression to the market-place and everybody else,' he replies emphatically. 'And because the people are alive, they are here and present. It would be intrusive. And I don't want to trade on that particular association any more than I intend trading on my title.'

Edward is certainly busy at the moment. He has assembled a high-calibre team and has five projects underway, including a BBC 2 motoring show and a series promoting Commonwealth ties. The Prince, who has had several years of experience making deals, is obviously very professional. I asked him what he learned from Andrew Lloyd Webber during his time at the Really Useful Company.

'He taught me how you make money out of the business,' came the brief reply. So what is the secret? 'In terms of documentaries it is quantity, in terms of



**TOP: Sophie is learning to live in the public eye.**

**LEFT: Edward with fellow media mogul David Frost.**

**FAR LEFT: The Prince is confident about the future.**

drama it is quality. I'll be shot down for saying that.'

As a formula, it seems to be working. 'We're just turning the corner now,' Edward reveals, and dismisses any discussion about how he would feel if Ardent turned out to be a failure. 'That's a hypothetical question,' he says firmly, 'and I'm certainly not going to make any comment.'

Although Edward is reserved, sometimes expressing himself in a way that is difficult to understand, he is also charming and has undoubted integrity. These are two qualities the Prince has had to draw on in his attempt to combine a royal background with a business career. □

