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Newspapers support recycling:

Recycled paper made up 80.6 per cent of the raw material for UK newspapers in 2006

Girl pen power rules ok?



Cumbrian PR and media adviser **Alan Air** turns the spotlight on Britain's female newspaper columnists in his latest look at what the papers say.

What on earth are we to make of Britain's female newspaper columnists? Irascible, sentimental, brash, irrelevant and ludicrous in equal measures, they distort realities like fairground mirrors. Trading on the perceived misfortunes of others, these hissing harpies breathe napalm on their victims one week, only to apply cooling balm the next.

Lampooned as Glenda Slaggs in *Private Eye* for their brazen about turns on every topic under the sun, their spiritual leader, the late Lynda Lee-Potter was actually beyond satire. I recall how days before Diana embarked on her fateful descent into the Alma Tunnel she ripped the Princess to shreds, only to publish a sycophantic account of her heroic life just hours after she perished – the previous week's tirade amazingly swept under the carpet.

A similar attack on the 'ever-bland' TV presenter Jill Dando by Carol Malone in the *Sunday Mirror* the day before she was gunned down outside her home was, again, excruciatingly ill-timed.

The monstrous matriarchs' endless essays during the global hunt for Maddy have often been particularly nauseous.

Whilst on the surface appearing heartfelt in their empathy, too many of their columns are prefixed by the sentiment: 'Whilst I cannot know how Gerry and Kate must be feeling right now...' – yeah, right, so just shut up and go file your nails instead of sharpening them – only to then dispense a cauldron of advice on coping with grief, guilt, the media and life without their daughter.

Chief witch is surely Julie Burchill. Despite earning brownie points for her witty advice to Diana about her impending marriage to Charles – simply 'don't do it' – a recent *Observer* column on 'cool' was simply a vehicle to knife 'starter husband' and fellow newspaper pundit Tony Parsons – nearly three decades after their own ill-fated union. Not so cool, Julie.

Daily Mail columnists Alison Pearson and Amanda Platell have certainly mastered the art of claustrophobic motherly concern for 'troubled' celebrities like Peaches Geldof. But after savaging Fergie's daughter's lumpy bikini physique, any pronouncements by these two on the role model dangers of size zero models must be taken with a large pinch of salt. Which – despite revelling in their occasionally

entertaining bitchy one-liners – is exactly how we should treat almost everything that most female columnists write.

JILL DANDO

The release of Barry George, wrongly jailed for the murder of Jill Dando, sent shockwaves through the media. So who killed her? This question was posed the day after George's acquittal by every newspaper from *The Sun* to *The Independent*.

I have a few questions for them. Why don't they attempt to find out? Why is it British newspapers can run fabricated stories suggesting Iraqi WMDs are just 45 minutes from hitting western targets but none of them can be bothered to put a couple of investigative reporters onto the Dando case?

And why has the great tradition of British, public interest journalism been allowed to wither away? Sadly, the truth is already out there.

Guardian reporter Nick Davies' book *Flat Earth News* revealed that even the best, most honest, decent and hard-working journalists now share the fate of battery hens, virtually chained to their desks, rarely speaking in person to anyone outside their grim word factories.

How can reporters who spend their entire working life hunched over keyboards churning out endless supplements develop meaningful, trustworthy, off-the-record relationships with other human beings that lead to real scoops – the sort that really do shake the world but which take a hell of a lot longer than 10 days to nail down?

It may be the official job of the police to catch Dando's killer but it should be the burning desire of every journalist worth his or her salt to get there before them.

DELUDED MALE

And finally... this month's award to the most deluded figure in the media goes to *Mail on Sunday* managing director Stephen Miron after a free giveaway of the new McFly album boosted sales by around 300,000.

"We have brought in a whole new audience that would have never talked about the *Mail on Sunday*," he said, as satellites revealed 300,000 dumped copies blowing all over the British Isles and a daisy chain of illiterate teenage girls clutching cardboard CD sleeves to their training bras, mouthing the words to the latest McFly single.

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