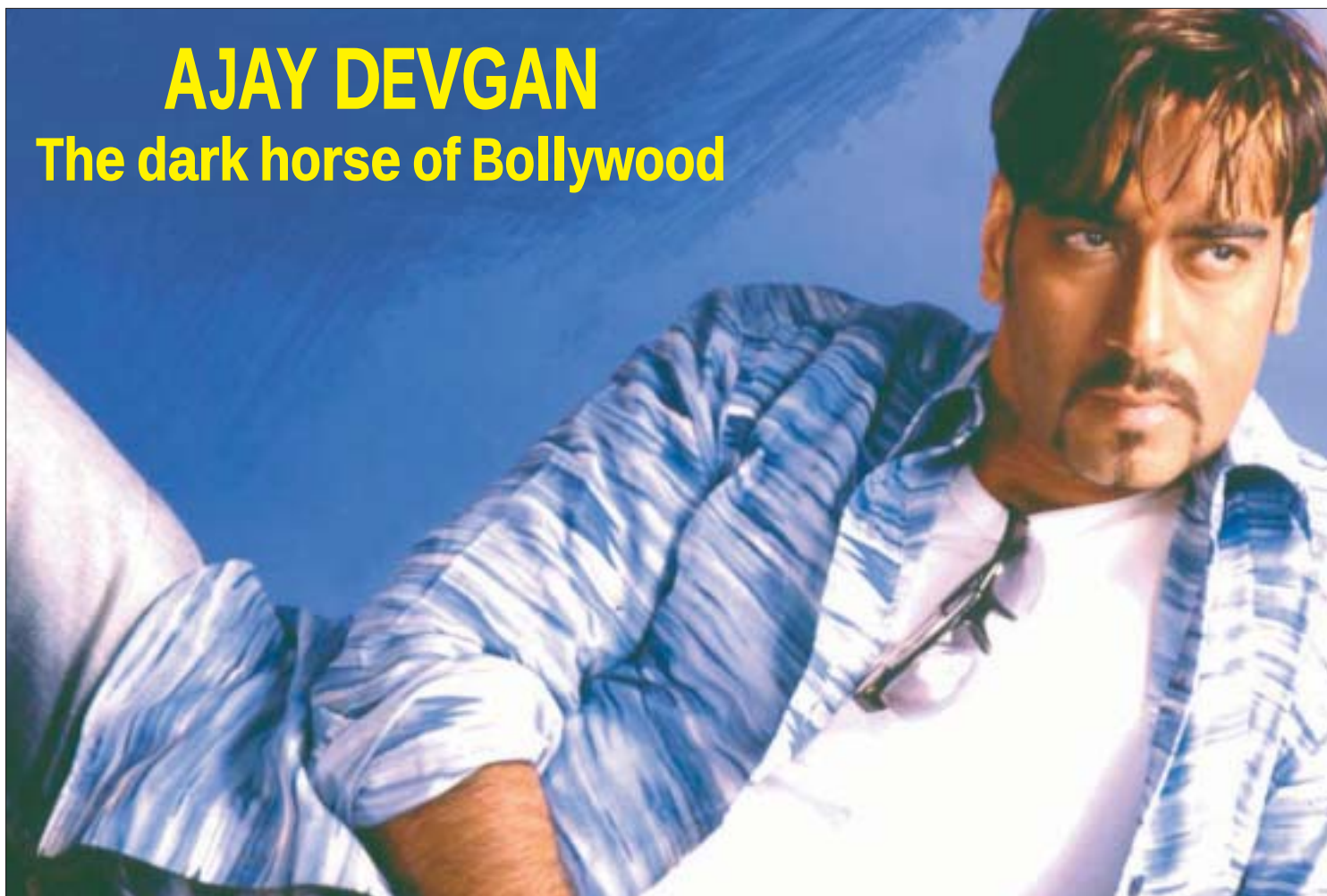


AJAY DEVGAN

The dark horse of Bollywood



Amitabh Bachchan once called Ajay Devgan the “Dark Horse” of Bollywood. But he is also proving to be a winning tortoise with his slow and steady growth. He is on a roll. After a forgettable 2007, he has started off this year with a bang. The intense actor, who is known for breaking the rules now and then, first charmed critics with his power-packed performance in Rajkumar Santoshi’s ‘Halla Bol’. Now, he is trying to tickle the funny bone in Rohit Shetty’s ‘Sunday’.

His roles in both the films are in complete contrast with each other. In ‘Halla Bol’, he is an actor-turned-activist, while he plays a corrupt cop in the fun-filled action thriller ‘Sunday’. Soon, the actor will turn director with ‘U Me Aur Hum’, scheduled to release in April this year.

Once billed as the likely inheritor of the “angry young man” roles, immortalised by Amitabh Bachchan, Ajay has always made a conscious effort not to get typecast. He started off as an action hero with ‘Phool Aur Kaante’, but is now regarded as a character actor. He is an actor who is just as convincing in brooding, macho roles as he is in comic capers. He is among the few stars who have challenged the notion that the plain-looking, not-so-fair actors cannot draw audi-

ences. He has the unique distinction of having bagged two ‘best actor’ National Awards. The low-key actor, who shuns publicity, is the first choice of veteran directors like Rajkumar Santoshi as well as Ram Gopal Varma. Son of famous stunt director, Veeru Devgan, he dabbled in direction and editing in a junior capacity before being lured before the camera for Kuku Kohli’s action flick ‘Phool Aur Kaante’, which was a box office hit. ‘Jigar’, ‘Vijaypath’ and ‘Divya Shakti’ were all action films, which had their own audiences.

Then came a lean period, when the fair-skinned aristocracy displaced Ajay. Observes

director Mahesh Bhatt: “His very place among the top stars was questioned because he was the son of a stunt director and was supposed to be good only in stunt roles. Ajay was patient and proved them wrong.”

‘Ishq’ came as a turning point. For the first time, he was accepted in a non-action hero role. Then came ‘Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha’, and the big hit, ‘Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam’, where his portrayal of the low-key, understanding husband, received critical acclaim.

His work in films like ‘Zakhm’, ‘Company’, ‘Gangaajal’, ‘The Legend of Bhagat Singh’ and ‘Omkaara’ leave no doubt that Ajay is indeed the “dark horse” of the industry.

Santoshi, who has done some of his best films with Ajay, is keen on making a film based on emperor Ashoka and then cast him in a mythological film based on the epic ‘Ramayana’. “I am sure people will be astounded by the way he interprets two compellingly fascinating characters. Ajay is one of the few leading men in the industry today who will some day become a valued character actor,” says Santoshi. “One of Ajay’s strengths is that he can get under the skin of any well-written role and make it his own. He has sharp, expressive eyes. He appears to be very natural in all the challenging characters he has played so far,” Santoshi adds. ■

