

How does Rosemary Conley look so good at 65? A bit of Botox and buckets of HRT!



Sixty-five years young: Rosemary Conley goes from strength to strength

myself and she looked at me and said: 'You would be pretty if you lost weight!' It cheered me up. My self-image was so poor I'd have settled for even looking OK.'

Rosemary joined a local slimming club but decided she could do a much better job, so she set up her own group using a diet she had devised, which would include grooming, fashion and make-up tips, and invited six of her neighbours to come along.

The Rosemary Conley empire had been born. Starting with 20 classes a week, it soon caught the attention of publishing company, IPC, which bought her clubs for £52,000. But company success was to come at a price.

'I wasn't used to working in big business,' she says. 'There were classes opening all over, I was working an 80-hour week and my marriage was suffering. I was working so hard I didn't know who I was.'

'I suppose it was inevitable that we drifted apart, as I just changed from being the woman that Phil married. We never had any arguments. It was a parting of the ways that felt appropriate.'

In 1982, she and Phil divorced amicably and agreed joint custody of Dawn, then seven. Nine months later, she met her current husband Mike Rimmington. But not long afterwards, IPC closed the fitness clubs down because they weren't profitable.

'I was hugely damaged by it,' Rosemary admits. 'I'd given my heart and soul, but IPC were only interested in the bottom line and I didn't work like that, I cared about my people. Maybe I was just naive.'

'Looking back I just hadn't got the experience and I was in way out of my depth.'

'It wasn't anybody's fault, it was just the way it was. But it took me

'Yes, I've got a few wrinkles, but I feel like I'm 40'

seven years before I was prepared to open classes nationally again — other than my own personal classes — and in 1993 we launched Rosemary Conley Diet And Fitness Clubs, but on a franchised basis and with everyone qualified to teach exercise to music.

She soon bounced back. The Hip And Thigh Diet hit the number-one slot and stayed there for a year. Today, she has sold nine million books and videos and has helped millions of people lose weight.

And so to my own personal weighing-in. Stepping onto the scales at Rosemary's class tonight, we both see that I'm a healthy weight — for a baby hippopotamus, but not for a woman of 5ft 8in.

'You're tall, so you can carry it off, but you'd probably feel better if you lost a stone,' Rosemary says, gently. She's absolutely right, of course.

I ask if, at 65, she's finally happy with her own body?

'I still cover up, I wouldn't go anywhere in a sleeveless dress — not many women of my age could — and there's no point having a plunging neckline with a crinkly cleavage.'

'But I'm happier with my body and with food.'

'I can honestly say I'm slimmer and fitter now than I was in my 40s and I'm optimistic about the future. I love keeping busy. I'll keep working until I'm 90.'

■ *THE Secrets Of Staying Young* by Rosemary Conley is published by Century at £20. To order a copy for £17 (incl p&p), call 0843 382 0000.

Phillips was fired from *Strictly* for instance. But I love that at the moment there is a re-emergence of such women. They are vivacious and beautiful. Women in our 60s are in a better place than we've ever been.'

Staving off the years physically is one thing, of course. Keeping the brain cells in tip-top condition is another.

Ten years ago, Rosemary watched as her businessman father Oswald Weston slowly declined into dementia before his death at the age of 89. She admits it is the one thing about ageing that scares her.

'It was very frightening to see,' she says. 'He was 80 when he developed it, so he had it for ten years before he died. It must have been incredibly difficult for my stepmother.'

'He ended up in hospital at the end for three years because you just couldn't look after him at home.'

'The first time he didn't recognise me was awful. The person who's known you longer than anybody in your life just looks at you as if to say: 'Who are you?' and that's just so hurtful. Apparently it's not hereditary. But yes it's frightening.'

'If we want to stave it off, we need to stay physically fit. Even a regular long walk can be life-changing.'

This is the message Rosemary has been shouting from the rooftops for four decades. It was in 1970 that, as



Picture: GRANT TRIPLOW

Fighting fit: Rosemary puts Jill through her paces

a plump secretary, she was stuck in a binge-eating rut and decided she had to do something about her weight. She had 'bulged' out of a size 14 since marrying her husband Phil two years earlier.

'I was a compulsive eater,' she says.

'I didn't have the ability to know when I was full, whereas now I eat only when I'm hungry and stop when I'm full.'

Her turning point came when a friend found Rosemary weeping about her size. 'I told her I hated