



Don't love me just because I'm beautiful: Striking a beefcake pose beside his Harley, left, and below, the studly cover boy.

The Sexiest Man in the World

You've seen him on book-racks as the Prince of Midnight, bare-chested with sword and scabbard, reining in a feisty black stallion; or as Savage Thunder, a half-breed Cheyenne, with a ravished redhead clinging to his buckskin-clad buttocks; or as the near-naked Man of My Dreams, clutching a buxom beauty against his loins.

His name is Fabio, and he's the imperially proportioned model whose likeness has been featured on the covers of bodice rippers for the past five years. Today, he glides into New York City's trendy Time Café much like a Roman god astride a sunbeam: bronzed with bulging biceps. His shoulder-length mane flows golden, his open white shirt displays an expanse of tanned skin. The legs, encased in crisp blue jeans, are firmly rooted to the floor. Clapping my hand warmly, he apologizes in a seductive Italian accent. His Mediterranean blue eyes burn. "I am so sorry to keep you waiting, but my taxi had a terrible accident!" This doesn't surprise, given the way waiters crash into each other when they approach our table.

The middle child of a well-to-do Milanese family, Fabio (last name Lanzoni, though like Cher and Madonna, he goes by only his first) has been posing since the age of fourteen, when he had a six-page spread in Italian *Vogue*. Then came offers for movie roles, but his strict parents insisted he stay in school. Remembers Fabio, "I was like, 'Dad, why aren't you going to let me do it?' And he said, 'We want you to have a childhood like every other kid, because that is very important.'" At twenty-one, he crossed the Atlantic and found his way to the Ford Modeling Agency. Within fifteen minutes, they had signed him on. His big

break came in 1986, when he landed his first cover at Avon Books. Since then, he has embodied over three hundred hunky heros.

On book tours and at romance-novel conventions, this best-selling swash-buckler meets millions of women. They wait in line for hours to pose for a shot with him holding them in his embrace.

Helping him keep in touch with his admirers is a nine-hundred number (900-90-FABIO). For \$1.99 a minute, you can hear Fabio's most profound thoughts on beauty and sensuality. ("Of the two kinds of beauty, physical and inside, I prefer the inside. You can go out with a beautiful woman, but if she's empty inside, all the beauty vanishes.") At the end of his discourse, he leaves room for messages from listeners. Each month, the most humorous, sensual, or "incredible" communication is rewarded with a return phone call from Fabio, who claims to spend up to an hour speaking with the adoring winner.

While Fabio insists that beauty isn't what attracts him to a lady, he's quite meticulous about his own looks. An ex-competitive skier and a bodybuilder, he works out one to two hours, five days a week, to keep his forty-eight-inch, clean-shaven chest perfectly sculpted. "I think people should take care of everything, mentally and physically. When people forget about their body, they forget about their mind." For intellectual exercise, he discusses ideas with a close circle of international friends. His favorite film is *Dances With Wolves*.

Fabio isn't as forthcoming as one would hope when it comes to his love life, though he admits there's no special

person at this time. He lives alone in West Hollywood with four Great Danes and talks to his mother in Italy twice a week on the phone.

Mama should be proud of her boy, whose career is sizzling. Recently, Fabio inked a six-figure deal with Avon Books to write three romance novels under his own name. On the slate as well are a line of T-shirts, a pinup poster, and his 1993 all-Fabio calendar, which has so far kept pace in sales with Claudia Schiffer's. He's also shooting for movie stardom, having played cameos in *Death Becomes Her*, *Scenes From a Mall*, and *Exorcist III*. If Hollywood doesn't pan out, he'll still get top billing in his diet and workout infomercials, to air soon.

Mention of these triumphs brings a boyish smile to his lips. "People always look for answers up there," he says, pointing heavenward. "But the answers are *inside*." Again, those incendiary eyes flash. "It doesn't matter where you put me, I always feel at home. I feel at home because I am at home inside." ☺

He's a lust object for millions of romance readers... the star of his own best-selling calendar. So what's on the mind of this magnificent bod?

By Barbara Lehmann