

I have no regrets about my hair transplant

Years of cruel jibes about his receding hairline finally convinced TV doctor **CHRISTIAN JESSEN** to take action

MY FATHER is blond and most of my family are Nordic so blond fine hair is in my genes and growing up I always had what I called very high, academic temples. I wasn't going bald in the classic way, it was just I had these very high temples that I never liked. I'm not going to lie and claim I was terribly traumatised by being bullied about my hair but there's nothing like being on TV presenting Channel 4's Embarrassing Bodies to suddenly have the world's criticism poured upon you.

I was nervous that the public would criticise my medical practices or my bedside manner but people were more interested in what I looked like and what had been a relatively minor issue was soon magnified.

People were saying, "Oh your hair's really crap" or, "Why can't you

'What had been a minor issue was magnified'

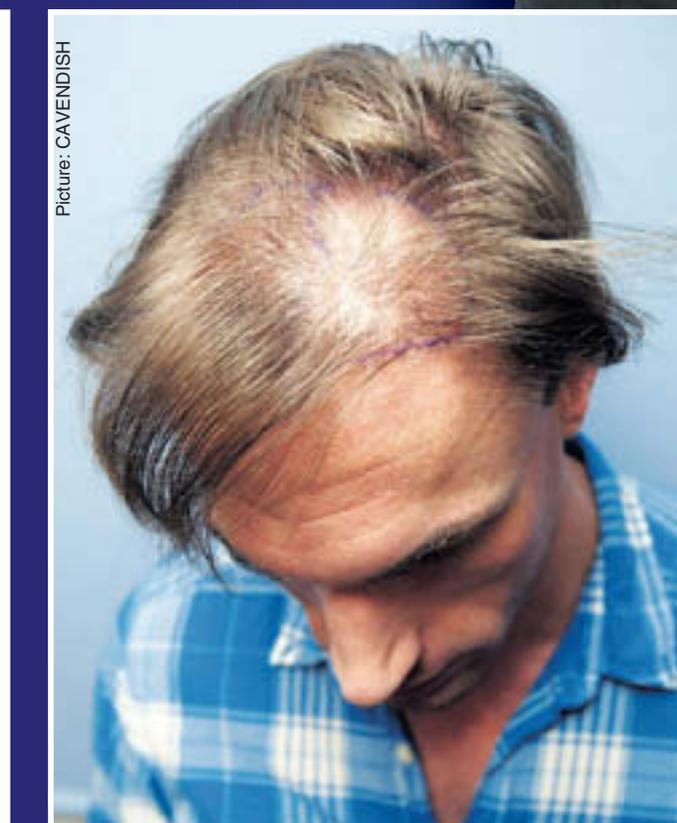
change your hairstyle?" Yet my hair was that way because it was covering up my temples.

I think the combination of being on TV and being criticised publicly on Twitter had an impact on my thinking. My hair wasn't making me unhappy as such but it was holding me back from being fully confident. If I'd continued working in medicine relatively anonymously I don't think I would have had anything done.

However one day I filmed a piece about men's hair loss and we were looking at various treatments and went to see hair transplant surgeon Asim Shahmalak.

His results were so far ahead of other techniques that I suddenly thought: "If I'm advising all these people and getting stuff sorted for them why the hell am I not doing that for myself?" I realised it was something that could be changed and would make a difference to me.

After a consultation with Dr Shahmalak I booked the procedure called follicular unit



Picture: CAVENDISH

transportation. First they cut a 17cm by 1cm strip of scalp from the back of my head.

That was sewn up and a team of brilliant people then undertook a laborious but painstaking procedure where that tissue is divided into 1,800 tiny hair follicle groups.

Mr Shahmalak then made a series of tiny holes in my scalp and his team planted the follicles into the holes individually. It was just like planting out seedlings. You make a little hole in the ground and pop in your seedling at the right angle.

The whole procedure, which was done under local anaesthetic, was uncomfortable but not painful and lasted seven or eight hours. For three or four days afterwards I had to be very careful with these tiny transplanted follicles. I had to spray them with salt water on the hour, every hour. Scabs then formed and

came off which was fairly hideous. After a few weeks a very distressing thing happened as all the newly transplanted hair follicles fell out. It was awful and I thought: "Oh, my God, I went through all of that and it's just all fallen out."

HOWEVER it was supposed to happen. Basically the hair falls out of the hair follicle but of course the root remains. The root is what has been transplanted so when that has been embedded into the scalp, new hair starts to grow. That's why this procedure takes between six months to a year to really see the difference but the psychological impact has been fantastic.

The first thing that I did was to get a smarter hairstyle. I used to hate having photos taken

but suddenly this became less uncomfortable. I also had a second similar procedure earlier this year as I started to lose some thickness in my hair after a bout of pneumonia.

To critics who might say that it's pure vanity on my part I say: "It's none of your business. You think what you want to think."

What matters is the way I feel about it, not what other people feel about it.

There's always been this silly thing about men having cosmetic procedures. If a woman has a breast augmentation no one really bats an eyelid as it's normal.

If women are happier having a procedure done what on earth is the difference between a man having something done?

It made such a difference to me and my confidence and also it shut up all the horrible comments I was getting. I've no regrets whatsoever

and my message to other men considering it would be that you just have to weigh up what matters to you more: what other people think or what you think and who is more important?

If you are losing your hair and you are really not happy about it then I think there have been enough high-profile public figures who have had it done and had great results for you to be able to do it yourself.

It must be a personal decision though. Make sure you do your research and choose a surgeon carefully.

● Dr Christian Jessen's hair transplant procedure was carried out by Dr Asim Shahmalak at Manchester's Crown Clinic. For information call 0845 2100 300 or visit crownclinic.co.uk

Interview by **NICK McGRATH**



Picture: GETTY

CROWNING GLORY: Dr Jessen's hair transplant has boosted his confidence