

Beauty & wellbeing

Alison's appliance of science

When forensic scientist and keen runner Alison Brodie couldn't find the moisturiser she wanted, she decided to make her own – from a laboratory created in her spare bedroom. Ruth Campbell reports

ALISON Brodie used to analyse DNA samples to help police gather the evidence they needed to convict in difficult cases involving rape, drugs, terrorism and burglary.

But today this former forensic scientist dons her white lab coat, face mask, disposable sterile gloves and protective goggles for very different reasons.

She has spent months investigating the effects of exercise on skin in order to create the perfect moisturiser for sports enthusiasts. And now, at last, working from a laboratory she has set up in the spare bedroom of her home in the middle of a tiny North Yorkshire village, she believes she has cracked it.

A keen runner and cyclist, Alison, 46, has always suffered from sensitive skin and found her face used to feel tight, stinging and itchy after exercise, leaving her with a dry, sore, dull complexion. Exposure to the elements combined with heat stress, sweat and dehydration was causing redness and acidic build-up: "I love exercising and all the benefits it brings, but I was really struggling with the effects on my skin," she says.

"I would put moisturiser on under my make-up to go to work, but couldn't wait to get home to take my make up off because my skin was crying out for more moisturiser shortly after I'd applied it."

The only cream that ever worked for Alison, who studied biology at Nottingham University, went out of production years ago. Ever since, she had dreamed of making her own.

Being made redundant when the Forensic Science Service at Wetherby, where she had worked for 20 years, closed last April was just the catalyst she needed. Initially, the mother-of-two started experimenting in her kitchen: "At first, I made a lot of mistakes. The cream was separating like butter or turning out hard like lard or too runny."

But losing her job gave her the kick start she needed to invest her redundancy money in setting up a laboratory, complete with proper benches and equipment in the former bedroom of her 22-year-old son Conor, in the family home, which overlooks the green in the village of Galphay, outside Ripon.

"I wouldn't have given up a job for the unknown, but this gave me the opportunity I needed," she says.

Looking out across sweeping views towards Studley Deer Park, it is from this clinically spotless room, surrounded by measuring cylinders, chemistry funnels, pipettes and lab beakers, along with equipment including pH meters, hot plates, scientific scales and UV sterilisers, that Alison has concocted her perfect formula.

She has tackled the project with the same

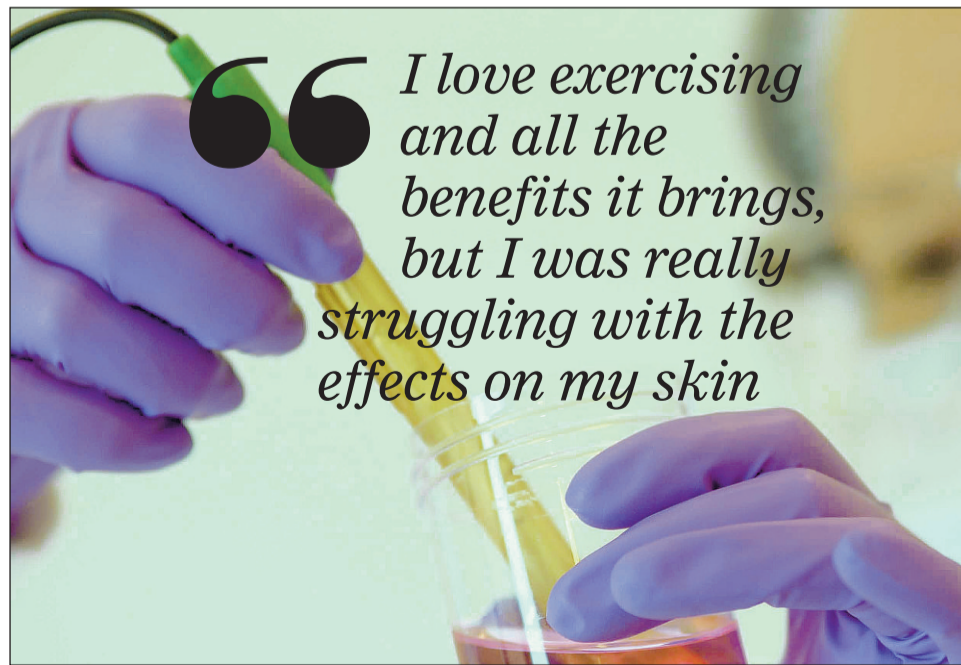
sort of scientific precision and meticulous attention to detail as she did in her former job, taking a range of courses in everything from natural skincare to cosmetic legislation to allow her to manufacture her own product.

She lined up 50 volunteers to try out her first cream and recorded all the feedback: "I went into a lot of detail, probably too much, like a scientific experiment. You learn so much as you go along."

PASSIONATE about using natural ingredients in her ultra-moisturising, non-greasy, fragrance-free formula, she says: "The more I researched, the more important natural ingredients became to me. Hence my creams are paraben-free, alcohol-free and petroleum product-free. I have worked in forensics with some of these ingredients and I certainly wouldn't want to put any of them near my face."

"I looked closely at what skin needed after exercise. That's why I have used things like cucumber extract and aloe vera to soothe and cool, with glycerine to lock in moisture and herbal extracts to strengthen the fine capillaries and avoid thread veins. Everything is in there for a reason."

One of the key ingredients is Harrogate Spring Water: "Water is a very important part of the recipe and this spring water is low in nitrates, sulphates and bacteria."



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In the running: Alison Brodie has created a skincare range Pictures: ANDY LAMB

The cream is also particularly rich in revitalising vitamins and antioxidants and carefully pH balanced to match the skin's natural acidity levels: "I make the cream in small batches so that the vitamins are fresh and more active, as they degrade over time. There is more skin rejuvenating power than you'll find in many top brand products"

Her eureka moment came when she discovered the perfect emulsifier to bind all her ingredients together: "It's a new product, derived from olives, which is very well absorbed and provides the closest match to natural skin oils. It was perfect, just what I wanted."

HER formula seems to work. Ever since launching their Brodie Skin care (BSC) Recovery Phase cream in November, she and husband and business partner Pete, a keen triathlete, have been astounded by the response.

Having had 5,500 sample sachets made up, they started distributing them to gyms and at shows, fairs and sporting events, hopeful that, once people tried it, they would want to buy.

"When our first customer took a sample from a gym, tried it, liked it and went on to order it from our website, that was a big thing. It worked."

After just a few weeks, they notched up their 100th customer and now, through their website, sell to sports enthusiasts all over the country, including Cornwall, Northern Ireland, Amsterdam, London and Northumbria.

"I have been blown away. It appears we have quite a following already. My teenage daughter Maeve and her friends have even started using it."

One happy customer from Cheshire has drummed up lots of orders after handing out samples to everyone in her yoga and exercise classes: "She says the cream just sells itself," says Alison. Many of the ingredients also act as anti-ageing treatments, she says, although that is just an added benefit.