

'My marriage isn't perfect'

CHAMPERS at Ascot and countless LUXURY holidays, but DANIELLE LINEKER reveals life with GARY isn't all hearts and flowers

BY ANTONIA HOYLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK HAYMAN



Danielle with Gary and Ella



Date night in a Victoria Beckham dress

Danielle Lineker is beyond tired. Having flown back from Los Angeles the day before our shoot, she was up at 3am trying to ward off jet lag with her slightly bizarre guilty pleasure – cooked chicken straight from the packet.

But a few eye drops later and she's looking annoyingly gorgeous – helped by her teeny size-8 figure and 32DD cleavage (courtesy of a boob job after the birth of daughter Ella, now 10). It's not surprising that her footie legend husband fell for her.

When Danielle, 33, a former lingerie model and air hostess, was set up on a blind date with ex-England international and now *Match Of The Day* host Gary Lineker, 51, in 2007, cynics said it would never last – and the five children they had from previous relationships and age gap would be too complicated.

But three years later, they tied the knot in Italy, and it's clear their marriage is the real deal. But life as a footballer's wife isn't all trips to the races (she was in Simon Cowell's Ascot box last year) and designer dresses, according to Danielle. In fact, best not call her a WAG at all...

What were you up to in LA then?

I had some meetings to do with acting. Nothing major. I always jinx things by talking about them anyway...

Ah, we take it the acting career's going well. We saw you strip off on stage in *Calendar Girls*.

Yes, that was terrifying. I was more worried about what the other actresses would think than the audience. They all had years of experience. I've always wanted to act, but where I grew up in Cardiff, they would've laughed. It just wasn't an option.

If we were WAGs, we'd spend our days shopping, lunching and swanning about. Why don't you?

I don't want to moan or say "woe is me", but I didn't have those opportunities growing up, and I'm privileged that I'm in a position now where I can do the things that I want. I'm always telling the kids they don't know just how lucky they are, having the education that I never had. Plus I'm ambitious. I'm a working-class girl and that's just what we do. We work.



'Gary and I have UPS and DOWNS, like everyone else'

Being stepmum to Gary's four sons [George, 20, Harry, 18, Tobias, 16, and Angus, 14] must be a bit of a handful?

It's taken a good four years for us to bond as a family. George and I are friends now. The middle two are at the teenage boy stage, but we get on. And Gary is incredible with Ella [Danielle's daughter by former Coventry City footballer Adam Willis, 35]. He shares the school run – which causes excitement at the gates if he turns up in his shorts on the way to the gym!

We bet. So how's married life?

We go through phases. I read all these interviews with celebrities saying how wonderful their marriages are and how everything is perfect, and I'm just not sure that's real life.

So it's not love's young dream?

We have ups and downs and fights like everyone else. I actually think it's good to clear the air. I'll accuse him of putting the bloody football on again, or we'll bicker over whose turn it is to peel the spuds this Sunday or take the bins out.

Hang on – you peel your own spuds? That's not very WAG-like...

I'd never see myself as a WAG because Gary hasn't played football for 15 years. And life's not actually that different to how it was before I met Gary anyway. I have lovely holidays, but I don't want to be a lady of leisure. I've never had a nanny. I take Ella to school, cook her dinner and help with her homework.

Any plans to add to the family?

Ummm [long pause]. If it happens it happens, but it's definitely not something we've decided we want to do. Our house in Surrey is like a hippy commune at the moment. I can't imagine a baby as well.

Your maternal instincts did go into overdrive on your recent trip to Bangladesh though, didn't they?

Absolutely. Gary and I went there for Sport Relief. As a mother, it was heartbreaking seeing kids scavenge for food. One girl I met was the same age as Ella, with the same brown eyes. I'm not a big crier, but I broke down.

It's obviously had a huge effect...

It was even more moving because →