





Emily's DOUBLE BOMBSHELL



Emily as Daphne in *Dad's Army*

Inbetweeners siren EMILY ATTACK is swapping her school tie for a very different kind of uniform in the cinematic reboot of *Dad's Army*. But, she tells *Judith Woods*, the two characters have more in common than you might expect ►

PHOTOGRAPHS *Lars H*

Before I meet rising star Emily Attack, who is about to appear as a home-front blonde bombshell in the new *Dad's Army* film, I make a point of watching her television oeuvre to date; it's only polite. Readers, I blushed. Then I squirmed. After that I laughed. Guiltily. Very, very guiltily.

Emily's first major role, you see, was as a sexually precocious schoolgirl in near-the-knuckle Bafta-winning Channel 4 series *The Inbetweeners*. Her character? The unambiguously monikered Charlotte 'Big Jugs' Hinchcliffe, a peroxide embodiment of every teenage boy's fantasy. At one point she seduces the hopeless, hapless Will (Simon Bird) in a fabulous sequence that culminates in him lying in bed anxiously asking her if he's lost his virginity. She witheringly assures him he hasn't and, with deadpan disinterest, puts her blouse back on.

'It was an absolute blast filming the show,' says Emily, 26. 'We had such a laugh, but I'd forgotten how rude it was until I came across a repeat recently. It was hilarious, but so crude! It's great to be associated with such a successful show and I'm proud of the work, but it comes as a relief when people recognise me as Emily rather than Charlotte Big Jugs.' With perfect comedic timing she glances down and grins, 'I mean, they're not even that big.'

Emily, a curvaceous size ten, cheerfully admits that she's 'always the biggest girl at any casting', but refuses to succumb to the sort of body-shaming that saw Carrie Fisher shed 2½ stone to appear in the new *Star Wars* film. 'I know I'm in a very appearance-driven industry, but this is who I am and there's no point starving myself into someone I'm not,' she says with a contented little shrug.

To be fair, the industry seems to like her just as she is – give or take her hair colour. After *The Inbetweeners*, she dyed it back to her natural shade in order to move away from the Charlotte Hinchcliffe image, but was asked to go back

to blonde for *Dad's Army*. In the end, she wore a wig, but with two successive roles as a brassy comedy sexpot, I can't help wondering whether she's destined to be the next Barbara Windsor – although she might need to work on her suggestive giggle (her suggestive wiggle needs no embellishment). 'That's funny, you're not the first person to say that,' muses Emily. 'And, you know, she's a respected,

person and I was so nervous at first that he let me sit jammed up beside him during the readings for moral support,' says Emily. 'Being in the film has been wonderful. I only wish my grandparents were still alive to see me – they were huge fans of the original. When I watched a few episodes I was blown away by how amusing and whimsical and ahead of the time it was. It was also a revelation to discover that it's

who encourage everyone and make you want to give your very best.'

Performing is in Emily's blood: her mother is the singer, actress and comedian Kate Robbins, who toured with Jenny Eclair last year. 'She's gorgeous, my mum; one hell of a woman,' says Emily. Her father Keith Attack had hits with his band Child in the 1970s and is now Bonnie Tyler's guitarist. Breaking the family mould, Emily's 24-year-old sister



From left: Emily with Simon Bird in *The Inbetweeners*; with her boyfriend Jack; with mum Kate Robbins, and starring in *Dancing on Ice* in 2010

Dad's Army showed that it's possible to be side-splittingly funny without vulgarity

glamorous, talented lady with a great career; so I'm more than happy to take that. I'll definitely have a bit of Babs, thanks very much.'

In *Dad's Army*, Emily appears alongside such luminaries as Catherine Zeta-Jones and Bill Nighy. The rest of the cast includes the inimitable Toby Jones as Captain Mainwaring and former *Inbetweeners* actor Blake Harrison as Private Pike. 'Blake was great. He's a lovely

possible to be side-splittingly funny without swear words or vulgarity!'

The trailer for the knockabout British comedy points to a gem of a family film, positively sparkling with national treasures: Nighy is the long-suffering Sergeant Wilson, Michael Gambon is the doddering Private Godfrey, and Ian Lavender, Pike in the original TV series, has been promoted (rather unfeasibly) to Brigadier Pritchard. Emily plays Daphne, the trophy wife of spiv Private Walker, played by Daniel Mays. There are many more women in the cast than the original, too, from Catherine Zeta-Jones, who plays a new character, journalist Rose Winters, to Sarah Lancashire as Private Pike's mother:

'It was a real honour to play alongside actors of their calibre,' says Emily. 'I learned so much. Bill is charming and chivalrous and funny, and Catherine so open and sweet and down to earth – she took us all out to dinner one night. They are both very generous performers

Martha works in PR and her brother George, 23, is a TV researcher. She also has a one-year-old sister, Nancy, on her father's side, her parents having split up around a decade ago.

'Growing up, my brother and sister were my best friends in the world, and still are. Although we lived in a huge, rambling house in Bedfordshire, we all insisted on sharing a bedroom until I went to secondary school and I remember having so much fun and laughing all the time,' she says. But when Emily was in her teens, her parents went through a difficult divorce. She responded to the acrimony by moving out aged just 17. Her sister joined her when she turned 16.

'It was a really awful time,' says Emily. 'My parents are great friends now, but it took quite a few years to reach that point. Divorce, splitting up a family, is a terrible thing.' It's an unusually honest admission of the impact divorce has on children. 'We had to sell our gorgeous house,' says Emily. 'That was a real wrench. My ➤



EMILY WEARS JUMPER,
Topshop. TROUSERS
and SHOES, Zara.
PREVIOUS PAGE: JUMPER,
Topshop. PAGE 43: TOP,
vintage Chanel, from
modesandmore.com

◀ brother, sister and I still fantasise about someday buying it back.' She says this with a smile tinged with genuine sadness.

Meanwhile, school was not exactly an easy ride. Emily's surname, which is pronounced Ay (as in hay)-tack, lent itself to nicknames such as Tic Tac, which she took in good part. But later, at the local comprehensive, she was bullied. 'I looked different, so I was an easy target,' she says. 'I wore make-up and fake tan so everyone called me a slapper and worse, even though I was really nice to everyone. Maybe I had too much of a strut? I honestly don't know. Coming from a family of performers, I learned about make-up early. I understood it not as a way of marking yourself out, but presenting yourself as well as you can.'

'I was also accused of showing off about my family, which wasn't true. It really knocked my confidence and it's taken me until now to recover. Maybe that's why I carry a need to be liked with me.'

By the end of her education, Emily felt unhappy and set apart from her classmates. Their resentment may have been fuelled, in part, by the fact that Sir Paul McCartney is her grandmother's cousin and remains close to her mother. Suddenly it clicks that Emily's facial features and tawny hair resemble those of Sir Paul.

'I have the wide face,' she says, 'but you should see my sister – she's the absolute spitting image of Stella [McCartney]. We were at her show at Paris Fashion Week with my mum and it was really fun. Stella is simply the coolest person on the planet.' Paul played two gigs with his mate John (no prizes for guessing his surname) Lennon as The Nerk Twins at Emily's grandparents' pub in Caversham, Berkshire, before stardom beckoned.

'Growing up, we used to spend loads of time in Uncle Paul's garden, playing with his horses and hanging out. He's really big on family so we would all be invited to the big New

Year's Eve parties he used to throw,' says Emily. 'These days I call him Paul, and he always takes an interest in what I'm up to.'

For her part, Emily always knew she wanted to perform, but was undecided about whether her future lay in singing or acting. Although she inherited her mother's musicality, she soon realised that another unexpected skill had been passed down to her: mimicry. 'My mum does impersonations and when I sing, that's what I do. When I sing a Taylor Swift song, I sound like Taylor Swift. I couldn't find my own distinctive voice, so acting it was.'

Emily's mother's agent took her on when she was in her late teens and she landed a part in the Caroline Quentin crime drama *Blue Murder*. 'The agent said I should go along for the experience because nobody gets their first audition,' she says. 'I did!'

Next was the coming-of-age comedy *The Inbetweeners* from 2008 to 2010, which led, inevitably, to interest from lads' mags. 'When I got offered the cover of *FHM* it was exciting,' she says. 'It makes you feel great to think that other people regard you as attractive, and there was no real harm in it. But there's only so much posing in your pants you can do, so I was glad when I moved out of that spotlight.'

Next, she took part in *Dancing on Ice*, did a few low-key British movies, including *Outside Bet* with Bob Hoskins, and dated Harry Styles. It was just a fling, but curiously (or perhaps not at all curiously) Emily is not merely reluctant to talk about it but actually raises an index finger to her lips to indicate they are sealed tighter than a super-injunction. When I jokingly press the issue, she sweeps her hair over her face and good-naturedly refuses to emerge until I stop.

Her home life has now taken a very different direction: several months ago she moved in with her boyfriend, model Jack Vacher. At 21 he's five years her junior, but the pair are incontrovertibly loved-up. 'I like my men to be men and make me

EMILY'S ESSENTIALS

READING *What She Left* by T R Richmond. It's a gripping social media crime novel.

LISTENING TO *The 1975*. From the very first moment I heard them I was a fan.

WATCHING Anything with Ricky Gervais: *The Office*, *Extras*, *Derek*. He's the funniest man on the planet.

MAKE-UP MUST Mac foundation. My boyfriend prefers the natural look so I have to hold back on the bronzer.

SIGNATURE SCENT Black Opium by Yves Saint Laurent.

SHOES OR BAGS? Bags, every time. I'm not big on high-end brands; I'm more of a Michael Kors girl.

DRESS UP OR DRESS DOWN? Down. My favourite clothes shop is Urban Outfitters.

CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT? Vita Liberata fake tan, which I apply at home, and a Charles Worthington blow-dry.

GUILTY PLEASURE I can belt out Céline Dion ballads for hours at a time.

feel protected and secure,' says Emily. 'Although he's only 21, Jack does just that.'

The pair have been an item since 2012, when she spied him working in a branch of Abercrombie & Fitch. 'I had friends who also worked there, so I made a few enquiries and when I found out he was single...' She trails off with a broad smile. 'I love him to bits and because his modelling work takes him away from the UK he understands the unpredictable nature of my career. All the same, when he was in Malaysia on a contract for two months I missed him so much that when he finally arrived back, I threw myself into his arms at the airport and sobbed, "Never again!"'

They are very much a classic

modern couple: cooking for each other; watching films or meeting friends in the local pub for a quiz or to watch a football match. ('I'm generally not interested in sport, but I find that if I put a bet on then I start to care and it's far more fun.') And, as is mandatory these days, they have even fantasised about getting a beagle puppy – when their work schedules allow. But despite preferring quiet nights in, there are big nights out, too.


'I can't decide if I love or loathe red-carpet events,' says Emily. 'I'm so lucky that designers offer me the most beautiful gowns, but I have to stop myself from saying, "Are you sure? Aren't you worried I'll put my foot through it or spill gravy on it?" I sure as hell am!' She claims to feel klutzy and anxious when confronted by the ranks of the paparazzi. 'It's nerve-racking to think of all those flashes going off – but far, far worse is the fear they won't!'

Any residual doubts Emily may have about her bankability will surely evaporate when *Dad's Army* hits the big screen next month. This year also sees the release of *Lies We Tell*, a powerful, dark drama shot in Leeds, in which she plays Tracey, the pregnant girlfriend of an evil drug lord. Then, in 2017, comes the release of *Iron Sky: The Coming Race*, the sequel to comic sci-fi action film *Iron Sky*, which is about German Nazis who flee to the moon after the Second World War; build a space fleet and return to conquer earth. It is another girlfriend role for Emily, but she is rising in the ranks.

'I just love working,' she says. 'I come alive. I learn so much from every role and from every actor I meet. I'm curious about the world and I hope that never stops. I feel so lucky.'

Lucky? Perhaps. But Emily is also a no-nonsense grafter with a comedic gift for playing buxom blondes. Babs, your crown will be in the safest of hands. ■

■ *Dad's Army will be in cinemas on 5 February*



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*Growing up, we
spent a lot of time
at Uncle Paul
[McCartney's].
He would invite
us to his parties*
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