

life&Style report

Meet the OAP twin prostitutes

The unfeasibly named Fokken sisters are still on the game. Keith Watson meets them ahead of their TV appearance



Game show: Darren McMullen with twin 71-year-old Amsterdam sex workers Louise and Martine Fokken and (below) without the mask

IT'S not quite the TV debut I'd been dreaming of: more of a walk-on part than a central role. Thirteen minutes into episode one of *Outsiders With Darren McMullen*, I'm in Amsterdam's red-light district, rebuffing the erotic overtures of a dodgy man sporting a studded jockstrap and brandishing a whip. I've rarely been so thankful to be on the other side of a pane of glass.

The action cuts inside. 'He's interested... he was quite interested,' gurns McMullen, a TV presenter playing the part of a prostitute in a carefully set-up stunt. He's play-acting rejection because, like the other random punter outside his window, I've walked on.

My curious cameo marked the end of a bizarre day in the company of Louise and Martine Fokken, at 71 the world's oldest identical twin prostitutes and only semi-retired. On the game for more than half a century, the Fokkens estimate they've serviced 355,000 men between them, in solo and doubles. It's not an exact figure – that many notches on a bedpost can only mean sawdust.

Their less-than-usual story features as part of a series in which McMullen, who hosts *The Voice* in Australia, takes an off-the-wall look at what could be loosely described as a range of alternative lifestyles around Europe.

Today they're filming an insider's tour of Amsterdam's saucy spots, a tour that includes beating McMullen on the backside with dildos in a sex shop. Walking around with them is a disconcerting experience: dressed in matching cherry-red coats, over-sized flowers in their dyed blonde hair, you can't miss them.

And on every corner someone stops them for a quick chat. It turns out a lot of these are ex-clients who

have become friends. In a break between filming, I ask if the line between business and real life ever gets blurred. After all, they've been sleeping with some men for 30 years and more. 'Some of our clients become friends, that's for sure,' says Martine. 'But they still have to pay. It's our business.'

It's all jaunty, tongue-in-cheek stuff and the Fokkens gamely groom McMullen for his tilt at life on the game. But there's a dark underside to their story.

Louise had three children by the time she was 21 and was initially forced into prostitution by a violent husband who insisted she had to go out to work. Martine followed her sister's path after working as

a cleaner at the brothel where Louise worked. But they are a defiantly glass-half-full pair. If they have regrets, they are well buried.

'We had a lot of fun – and we still do,' says Louise. 'You have to find out in your life what's the best way for you to survive and for us it was this way.'

That said, they are wary of the way the prostitution business has changed.

'It used to be that a guy would come to you and you knew he was drunk so you knew where you were with that,' says Louise. 'But these days, you don't know what pill or stuff he has taken.'

The girls now, they are taking a lot of risks.'

The welfare of 'the girls' has been paramount for the Fokkens. In their day, they started an informal trade union for Amsterdam's sex workers and have seen the business from the other side, as managers of a brothel. You sense the Fokkens have had a lifetime of putting a brave face on things – and that they're the very definition of unshockable. The ménage-a-twin-trois was just one of the items on their sex menu.

Their good cheer dims slightly when an-

swering questions about how they dealt with bringing up children while working as prostitutes. Louise tells one funny story about how she kept a pot of urine by the door in order to offer any social worker who appeared on her threshold an in-pronuptu golden shower. But it was clearly a bumpy ride.

What did their kids make of their mums' profession when they were old enough to understand it?

'There were a lot of questions,' says Martine, mistress of understatement. 'But mostly they were worried that we'd be safe. But what's safe? Come on, you can be hit by a train – life isn't safe.'

There's already been one film of part of their life story and they're trying to get funding for another, taking in their latter career as artists – their self-taught studies of life in Amsterdam's red-light district are for sale in city galleries. They still have a keen eye for the main chance.

Ourchat over, Martine – or it might be Louise – grasps me firmly by the arm and fixes me with her steely gaze. 'Could you get money for our film?' she asks, with a certain look in her eye. The Fokkens, women who know that everyone has their price.



Outsiders With Darren McMullen begins on National Geographic on May 9 at 10pm.