

Model recruit

Pin-up Keeley Hazell confesses to brief flirtation with a life in uniform

Interview: Richard Lenton

WHEN I told a mate of mine that I'd arranged to interview Keeley Hazell, he gave me a look that seemed to suggest I'd burgled his house and run off with his wife.

The girl who is causing loins to stir across the country is seriously hot property at the moment. Her time is of such a premium that, despite her agent's promptings, I had to wait nearly a week before the promised phone call finally materialised.

And, when she did ring, I got the call at a slightly inconvenient time – finding myself cradling a friend's six-month-old baby girl in a vomit-soaked hand. For a millisecond I considered pressing reject, but, when it's the nation's number one glamour model on the line, you simply have to drop everything. Luckily the baby's got a hard head.

And when we finally meet, I'm not disappointed. Keeley is obviously in possession of what the tabloids would describe as "ample charms", but she's also a natural beauty, somehow oozing sex appeal in leggings, a rock-god T-shirt and ripped cardigan.

The girl who is, I'm reliably informed, the most Googled person in the country, has come a long way from her days as a trainee hairdresser.

However, life could be radically different for the 20-year-old Lewisham lass if she'd followed up her initial interest in a career in the Army. I could have been chatting to Private Keeley Hazell rather than a very public one.

"A good friend of mine, Dan Davis, was joining the Army about three years ago and I was thinking of doing the same," she said.

"I filled out the application, but then

Dan came back with, what to me, were horror stories of the Army fitness test.

"I knew then that I wouldn't get in. But I respect the job that they do so much. It must be so hard at times and it takes a strong-minded person to do it."

The Army's loss is without doubt a major gain for subscribers of lads' mags across the country. Since her brief flirtation with life in the Forces, the likeable and unaffected pin-up has ridden an amazing three-year roller-coaster ride to become Britain's top glamour girl.

And, according to those erstwhile judges who read *FHM*, she's now second only to actress Keira Knightley in the list of world's sexiest women. And they say no-one remembers who finishes second.

After claiming the *Daily Star's* "Search for a Beach Babe" crown at the age of 17, Keeley shot to fame by winning *The Sun's* "Page 3 Idol" competition in December 2004 – a prize which earned her £10,000's worth of clothes and a year-long modelling gig with the Current Bun.

"My boyfriend at the time took some pictures of me to send in to the competition, but I never dreamed I'd win," added Keeley, who was whisked off to Tobago for her first assignment just days after scooping the prize.

"The day I won was memorable for a lot of reasons, seeing as though I hadn't even told my family that I'd entered. I had a lot of explaining to do."

Keeley's life had changed overnight and she was soon a regular fixture on the front covers of glossy men's magazines like *Loaded*, *Arena* and *Nuts*. Last year she was chosen by Sony as the face of PlayStation 3 game, *Formula*

One 06, and earlier this year she became The Parachute Regiment's official Page 3 girl, visiting 3 Para's barracks in Colchester to line up with her adopted colleagues.

She has also dipped her toes into the world of acting with a cameo appearance in the British movie, *Cashback*. It's an avenue she'd like to pursue, and her agent has been in preliminary discussions with Hollywood producers about casting her in

Baywatch The Movie.

Not bad going for a former teenage tearaway who admits that she was "a right handful" during her formative years. Despite being bright and streetwise, Keeley, who is dyslexic, struggled at

school and her rebellious side came to the fore as she stayed out until all hours drinking with her mates.

"I think being a teenager is a very hard time of your life, and that in itself is another reason to send you off the rails," added Keeley, whose parents split up when she was 13. "I think when I realised that I wasn't giving as much as I could I started to knuckle down. At the end of the day I was the only person who was going to suffer if I carried on as I had been."

Keeley's new-found dedication to her studies paid off as she left Bromley's Ravensbourne School with a handful of GCSEs. However, as she began her adult life washing hair in the local salon, the charmingly down-to-earth beauty could have had no idea what a stir she would be causing within just a few short years.

"There are times when you stop and go 'wow, where I am is amazing', but it's rare that you get time to take stock because everything's happening so fast," she added. "I've got great friends and family around me and that makes it

easy to stay grounded.

"And you just don't know with the modelling industry; people come and go very quickly. I couldn't really foresee what was going to happen and I'm not complacent enough to think that it will last forever."

While Keeley has enjoyed an amazingly successful ride, she has also experienced

'If she'd followed up her initial interest in a career in the Army I could have been chatting to Private Keeley Hazell rather than a very public one'



Pictures: Cpl Tony Belgrave RLC





the extreme lows that life in the public eye can bring when, in January, a former boyfriend released an intimate video of the pair on the internet.

“It was very upsetting. The main factor of it is the breach of trust. You trust somebody and they let you down and that’s hard to take,” she said. “We had been in an on-off relationship for a year and, at the time, I really loved this guy and trusted him. Never in my wildest dreams did I think he would betray me in this way.”

However, Keeley is adamant that the experience has not put her off men. “I’ve moved on. You can’t go through life not trusting people, you’ve just got to be very careful who you trust. It certainly hasn’t made me hate men.”

She has been linked with the likes of Chelsea star Joe Cole and comedian David Walliams in the past, but Keeley is still waiting to meet the man of her dreams. “I’m not dating at the moment, so there might be a lucky squaddie out there – you never know,” she said. “I don’t have a type of guy that I go for, I like someone who’s funny and has a good personality. They also need to wear good shoes.”

Time to get the boot polish out lads. ■