

This model is 13 years old. Should we be taking her picture?

In the fashion industry, 25 is over the hill. Wrinkles and cellulite are unacceptable, so increasingly young girls are being plucked from the playground. Chris Morris meets the latest gym-slip ingénue. Photographs by Chris Dunlop



'So, do you interview a lot of celebrities?' asks Twinkle Marsh, as she slopes nonchalantly towards her London model agency. She is flanked by her ever-present chaperones – mum Amanda and family friend and driver Gary, a Marks & Spencer baker on a day off. 'I don't really do celebrities,' I reply. Twinkle raises an eyebrow, adjusts her pink, studded dog collar and gives a look as if to say, 'I'm sorry?' 'Until now,' I venture. She accepts my apology with a wry smile and carries on along the pavement, peering occasionally from beneath her fringe. 'I've got a haircut later,' she says. 'Trevor Sorbie. Do you know him? He's a friend of mine.' Twinkle is thirteen.

According to her agency, Select Model Management, Twinkle is destined for stardom. She has already been shot by elite fashion photographers Patrick Demarchelier (for America's *Harper's Bazaar*), Manuela Pavesi (for Italian *Vogue*), and Mario Testino (for British *Vogue*). 'Any model would give their eye-teeth to be chosen by those photographers,' says Sarah Leon, head of new faces at Select. 'It's generally regarded that with such endorsement, your career is made.'

Meanwhile, Twinkle the schoolgirl is still wondering where she is. One minute, she was lying on her bed in a Sheffield council house, deep in teen angst, listening to her Marilyn Manson, Placebo and Nirvana CDs, the next she was on her way to Milan for an Antonio Fusco advertising campaign. 'I'd never thought about modelling,' she says. 'It's like a dream, and I'm waiting to wake up. I always thought I looked like an alien.' Twinkle now visits

London for shoots, castings or test shots at weekends or during holidays. Then, on Monday morning, she goes to school.

The agency rechristened her Twinkle because she 'twinkled' (her real name is Eileen). And so far, Twinkle's career path has been a real fairy tale. In May 2000, she appeared on ITV's chat show, *Trisha*, talking about being a victim of bullying. It began in September 1998. After refusing the advances of a boy in her year, he set out to taunt her. 'Sometimes he'd just swear at me, other times he'd grab my hair, throw me to the floor and rip up my books,' she recalls. 'I was afraid of telling the teachers and didn't want to worry Mum.'

Six months into the school year, Twinkle couldn't take any more. 'One morning, I woke up feeling really, really low. At school I spent most of the day thinking it would be my last. I'd thought about suicide several times. When I got home, I took a bottle of pills that Mum used

for back pain and swallowed them in handfuls. I started to feel sick – that's all I can remember.' Twinkle was found on the sofa by Amanda, ten minutes later. At Sheffield Children's Hospital, doctors gave her a 40 per cent chance of survival. She came out of a coma two days later.

Twinkle had counselling for three months before going back to school, but the bullying continued. 'I argued back and got into a fight with the boy. A friend reported the attack and he was expelled. A few weeks later, I was in the park when he showed up. He started punching me in the face and calling me a snitch. Others joined in, kicking me and ripping my clothes.' The incident was captured on CCTV and those involved were given police cautions. Twinkle refused to leave her bedroom for a week.

Six months later, she was transferred to a new school and appeared on *Trisha*, but things weren't much better. 'I got picked on because I'd been on TV,' says Twinkle. But everything was about to change. Two model agencies had spotted Twinkle on television. 'She wasn't just another beautiful girl,' explains Leon. 'She had a 1960s look – like Jean Shrimpton, with Twiggy's eyes. She is young, but we wouldn't have gone ahead if we didn't think she was special.'

Both agencies started chasing her. When the reality of the situation sank in, she celebrated by 'jumping up and down on my bed singing *Lunchbox* by Marilyn Manson: "I wanna be a rock and roll star, so no one fucks with me."' She was signed to Select within a week. Amanda, a former kitchen assistant, was worried that modelling might ▷



TWINKLE MARSH

HEIGHT	5'3"
BUST	32"
WAIST	24"
HIPS	34"
SHOE	41"
HAIR	BLONDE
EYES	BLUE

SELECT®

Silk camisole, £125, Pour Les Filles; suede necklace, £95, Emma Cook. See Directory for stockist details



Twinkle with her mother, Amanda, who chaperones her to all shoots and castings

◀ make the bullying worse. 'We did talk about whether she should do it, but it was a wonderful opportunity and one she felt she couldn't turn down.' Twinkle's modelling provokes the odd sarcastic comment at school, but the bullying has stopped.

Twinkle was signed to Select just three months after the BBC's *MacIntyre Undercover* exposed the seamier side of modelling. The programme showed girls of Twinkle's age, and a few years older, being

lured into a world of sex, drugs and prostitution. 'I didn't see that,' says Twinkle. 'Was it good?' As the agency's youngest model, there must be fears she could be influenced by the seedier side of the business. Not so, argues Twinkle. 'People inject heroin around where I live. Some of my friends have dabbled in drugs, but they just mess up your life.'

Twinkle's attitude to modelling itself seems equally level-headed. 'At the first shoot, I didn't know what

was expected. It was weird having people look you up and down. But it's just about playing a part, like acting, dressing up like a doll, pulling different expressions. People say I can look rock 'n' roll, snobby, innocent or like a fairy-tale princess.'

Following the *MacIntyre Undercover* revelations, principally about Elite models, there were calls for an industry ban on using models under sixteen. Select says it is following government regulations limiting the hours teenagers should work, with the endorsement of Twinkle's local education authority. 'The programme exposed a very old-fashioned section of the modelling industry, mostly based in Italy,' says Sarah Leon. 'The British world is very pro-education and pro-family.'

'Twinkle has always been portrayed as a thirteen year old in a creative, high-fashion picture, rather than as a sex object or someone older. For Italian *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, the features were about teenagers. She can look sexy, but that is something she can exploit later. We think she'll be famous. A worldwide superstar: modelling, acting or both.'

Amanda goes along to each shoot or casting. Often, she says, she feels uncomfortable. 'In the beginning, I thought: "She's too young, she's still a child." But she's been around adults most of her life. Sometimes I do think she is too mature for her age, which is sad, but children grow up quickly these days. I've heard about the pressures on teenage models – diet and weight, access to drugs and sex – but I've seen no evidence so far. Kids are more likely to get into drugs or discover sex at school than at a photo shoot.'

Amanda brought up Twinkle single-handedly, after her marriage broke down when Twinkle was four.

She is now considering a move to the capital. 'We both want a fresh start. I haven't had contact with Twinkle's dad for six years and he never paid a penny in maintenance. I've struggled with part-time jobs and social security, maybe now Twinkle can have a better life.' Amanda is firm that any money Twinkle makes belongs to Twinkle. She has opened an account for her earnings to which Twinkle will have access at eighteen.

Twinkle is confident she can keep her feet on the ground. 'I live for now,' she says. 'I know it could end any day and I'll take a break for my exams. I'll do it as long as it lasts.' The antics of some of the other models have helped Twinkle form a resolve not to lose touch with reality. 'One girl complained to the make-up artist about a heat spot on her arm. "Dean! Oh my God, it's a heat spot. Can you sort it out? Dean!" I was amazed. I said to myself, "Please God, never let me get like that."'

Twinkle hasn't had her head turned by the boys in the industry either. Her boyfriend is the lead singer of a local band. They met through friends last August. 'Oh God, should I talk about this?' she says, blushing. 'They're a Goth band. I've always liked all things dark: horror, spooks, the occult. I'm quite into religion. I've read the Bible and the Koran and studied Wicca and paganism. It's a challenge to the way most people look at life.'

Twinkle remains pragmatic about her career. 'In front of the camera, I'm Twinkle the model. At school, I'm an average schoolgirl. It's the photo that looks beautiful, not me. It's just a job. Other girls have a paper round – I go to Milan,' she adds with a faux pout, before disappearing for her Trevor Sorbie haircut. Cost: £300. ■

Burn, baby, burn

Twinkle may be a sensible young woman, surrounded by responsible adults, but unfortunately not all child stars are quite so lucky...



Drew Barrymore Thrown into the spotlight for her role as Gertie in blockbuster *E.T.* at seven, it wasn't long before she was out doing the round of showbusiness parties. She was an alcoholic by nine, smoking dope by ten and abusing cocaine by twelve. A year later, she tried to kill herself with a knife.



Judy Garland After starring in *The Wizard Of Oz* at sixteen, Judy was a star. To keep her weight down, her film studio gave her barbiturates. She spent the rest of her life on

drugs and died, aged 47, of an overdose. **Danniella Westbrook** Danniella landed a part in *EastEnders* straight after her GCSEs. She had a tempestuous relationship with East 17 singer Brian Harvey, admitted to a cocaine habit and her BBC contract was not renewed. When Danniella returned to *EastEnders* in

1999, it was reported she was given regular drug tests. Last year, surgeons were shocked by the state of her nose after her nostrils collapsed due to cocaine abuse. **Danniella** claimed that a car accident was also to blame. **Macaulay Culkin** Macaulay was only twelve when he found stardom in *Home Alone*. His father, Kit, secured huge deals and work for his other children on the back of his son's success. But tensions grew over his financial affairs, his parents divorced and the young star began to lose popularity. He married at seventeen, but separated from his wife two years later. He is currently rebuilding his career.



Lena Zavaroni Star of the stage, Lena was singing and dancing from a very young age. In her teens, she developed anorexia and spent the rest of her career – from TV celeb to panto star – battling the illness. She became a recluse and died in 1999

after having a brain operation which she had hoped would cure her of the disease. **Mark Lester** The star of *Oliver*, Mark's earnings were put into a trust until he was eighteen, when he collected £180,000. He later admitted to blowing much of it on drugs.

Psychologist Mark Griffiths, who has researched the psychology of fame, says: 'There is no doubt that teenagers are more susceptible to the pressures put on them by fame. At that age, they haven't achieved the necessary level of cynicism and can fall victim to the pressures of being in the spotlight: blowing all their money, getting into drugs and having to start again at eighteen. But there are also many who have gone on to achieve success, such as Dennis Waterman or Phil Collins. Child stars may also find guidance within the business. Take the recent reported romance between Billie Piper and Chris Evans – she may well find it beneficial to learn from his experience of dealing with the media.'