

EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW

Jack the lad grows up

EastEnders' Jack Ryder

- I avoid glitzy showbiz bashes
- Money and fame mean nothing to me
- Jamie and Sonia should stay together

MEN ONLY
Is this the year's most controversial drama?
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MARTIN AND JOE SHAW

Why father and son make a great double act

DEBRA STEPHENSON
Bad Girl turns funny girl



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Jack Ryder politely asks if he can replace the plastic pop music that's blasting out at the photo shoot with a CD he has on him – and then proceeds to put on a very tasteful, largely classical-based film soundtrack. It's then you know that he's not your average teenage soap star.

Still just 19, Jack possesses a maturity beyond his years – but he also possesses the jelly-eyed looks that have catapulted him into the limelight and onto a million teenage walls since he 'fell' into the role of Jamie Mitchell nearly three years ago. In fact, you're unlikely to meet a more reluctant heart-throb.

'I never wanted all that stuff. I've never taken my top off for photos and I'd never do it. I'm here to do a job, and do the best I possibly can, not to look pretty.'

But he undeniably does – and wherever he goes, hordes of adoring girls follow. 'I don't take it seriously. It seems surreal, really strange, when schoolgirls start screaming and grabbing you... it's not something I'm comfortable with.'

Jack's on-screen persona as sexy but lovable Jamie only intensified his teen appeal – but recently Jamie has shown a darker side to his character, holding his own against Billy Mitchell and Steve Owen, and cheating on Sonia.

'I love getting the scripts and seeing what Jamie's up to, and it's great because I get a different reaction from blokes now. I used to get a lot of stick, but now they look at me not as some teeny, squeaky clean thing, but as if I'm doing a job, and fighting and mucking about, doing what they probably do, so it's good. I don't know what the females think...'

Probably they love him even more – and with Jamie's transition from boy to man, Jack may find himself lusted after not just by Mizz readers, but those of Cosmopolitan too.

But despite a dramatic storyline this week in which Sonia discovers Jamie has had a fling with Zoe, Jack is hoping Jamie learns from his mistake. 'I really want Jamie and Sonia to stay together, to show that teenagers can have a relationship that means something. People think when you're young you have to see lots of different people, but if you're happy with someone, why not stick with them?'

'When I was a kid, all my mates were

Little Jack cornered

His on-screen love tryst is about to be exposed, bringing Jack Ryder even more attention. So why is this teen idol so ill at ease with his growing fame and fortune?



going out, getting drunk and playing the field, but it never appealed to me. I went to my room and played my guitar. All those flashing lights, the music and people falling over at clubs, I just can't see what the fun is in that.

'I've never done all that stuff and don't think I ever will. I'd rather be indoors, in a restaurant, or go to the park and chill out.'

Thrust into the limelight at such an impressionable age, Jack could be forgiven for basking in it for a while – but he avoids glitzy showbiz bashes like the plague. 'Just because you're on the TV doesn't mean you have to go to all these parties. I just get up, walk my dog, go to work, come home, have my dinner and go to bed – exactly the same as if I was working anywhere.'

'Fame is a load of nonsense, it means nothing, but there are people who react strangely to it and think it's something special,' says this grounded and likeable young actor. 'We all breathe the same air, but some people think they smell of roses, and it's just not true, we're all human beings, we've all got feelings. Some people disrespect that and I hate it.'

'I've never seen why people are treated better because they have cash. Money is just paper at the end of the day, but it seems to be the general gist of things, like people who get into clubs in London if they look the part, like wearing a pair of Gucci shoes. It's all about wealth, and it really winds me up.'

Does he feel ill at ease about the money he earns? 'Yeah, I do. A lot of people are scraping by and I think, "What have I done to deserve this?"'

'I haven't helped anyone, haven't worked hard for this, but I've got all this stuff – my DVD player, my little house, and I'm smiled at every day by people who want to shake my hand.'

'It's strange, and hard to deal with. But I don't deal with it, I block it off, and that's the best way.'

'I'm feeling really weird now talking about it.'

cover story | JACK RYDER |

because if you think about it too much you'll go crazy – or walk. I'd just go. I'd buy a little villa in Spain or Italy and grow some olive trees or something.'

Jack lives in south London with his brother Harry and his cherished boxer dog Hendrix, who sometimes hangs out with Jack in his dressing room, where he plays his guitar and writes songs during gaps in filming.

Inevitably, there have been approaches from record companies, keen

'I really want
Jamie and Sonia
to stay together'

to cash in on Jack's popularity with the teen market, but he says: 'I would never ever do a pop record, it's just not something that interests me. Money is nothing to me, popularity is nothing to me. I wouldn't care if I worked in Boots – as long as I've got my friends and family.'

At some point he'd like to record an album, 'but in a more underground way, but films are his main ambition. First he needs to become an actor, he insists.'

'I'm not an actor. If someone asked what I did for a living, I'd say I read lines, ponce around in front of the camera and get paid for it. The day I'd start to think I might be an actor is when I do a film alongside a serious professional, like Robert De Niro. If I'm doing something and feel good about it, then that's acting for me. But I'm not doing that at the moment, I'm just doing a soap.'

There have been rumours he's on the point of quitting *EastEnders* and travelling the world. 'Yes, I'd like to travel the world sometime,' he confirms 'but not NOW.'

'I love working on the show, it's what I want to do right now. But you do have your ups and downs and think, "God, what's all this about?"'

'Sometimes I think, "No, I don't want to do it," but other times I do. I really don't know what I want to do, except be with the people I love, and that's it.'

JANE DIMOND

Overpage: Jamie proves he's a Mitchell