

Brucie's latest game-show beauty is also a Cambridge University student

Didn't she do well?

BY CAROLINE PHILLIPS

SHE has just the right qualities to be the new hostess dealing the cards on Bruce Forsyth's *Play Your Cards Right*. Appearing alongside the toupeed senior citizen who is the undisputed king of the game show, Carley Carter is beautiful, shapely and laughs readily at Brucie's sausage-machine wit and banter.

As she takes her turn with fellow card-dealer Debbie Flett, it's all good, middle-of-the-road fluff — just as Brucie likes it. "I'm the leader of the pack, which makes me a lucky jack," he trilled as the girls made their entrance on Sunday night. "For openers here's a pair of cuties, here's my darling dealing beauties..."

But 19-year-old Carley isn't your stereotypical tap-dancing, sequin-clad, vaudeville-style hostess. She's in her first year of reading English at Cambridge University, went to Gravesend Grammar in Kent — where she passed nine GCSEs and four A-levels — and is passionate about Keats.

When you meet her (nice to see you, to see you nice, as Bruce would say) she talks about subjects such as psychologist Zimbardo's prison simulation experiments.

Yes, it's true that Carley is a model — she has appeared in C&A adverts and teenage magazines — and that she started her career, aged 17, behind the counter in McDonald's.

But she has only ever attained A and B grades in her exams and dare not have her IQ tested in case it's less than that of her 10-year-old sister. Cassell, you see, has an IQ of 178 and joined MENSA at the age of five.

WE MET in a Gravesend hotel near the home in which Carley lives with her sister and mother. She is as thin as two matchsticks, wearing black leather trousers and a black blouse, her long hair straightened with Brylcreem and glistened with Gliss. She has a false front tooth, the result of a childhood accident — "I smile in pictures and they touch them up afterwards. It doesn't show on television because light flares," she explains — and she is chewing gum. She is also appreciative, natural and innocent.

Carley was put up for the *Play Your Cards Right* audition by Crawfords, her modelling agency. "I'd watched Bruce on television since I was a child, had always wanted to work in television and thought it would be fun," she says.

At her second interview, Bruce asked Carley what three things she'd want with her if she were stranded on a desert island. She replied: "I'd take a radio for music, psychology books



VARIETY SHOW: Carley, above right with Brucie and fellow 'dealer' Debbie Flett; left, in coveted Cambridge scarf; and, right, with mother and sister at home



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because I read a lot (particularly Freud and Piaget) and obviously I'd need clothes in case I am rescued, so that I'm decent." They thought that was funny. And, on the same day last August, Carley learned that she had been accepted for both Cambridge and *Play Your Cards Right*.

She celebrated by staying in with her mother, Caroline, for a curry and glass of orange juice. Then she felt so overwhelmed she went to bed early.

Play Your Cards Right pulls an audience of about 10 million viewers. Carley was paid £7,000 for 17 shows, which were recorded at the cracking pace of two per night.

Not that she had much to do other than smile, clap and hand out cards and prizes. During Sunday's programme, she uttered just two words: "Yes, fine," in response to Brucie's enquiry about her well-being.

Is Oxbridge full of undergraduates

yearning to become an ace in Bruce's pack? Certainly, Carley is not your average stilettoed hostess with material aspirations, champagne tastes and an eye for the boys. Does she typify a new generation?

Carley is a virgin, a teetotaler and a vegetarian. She is also a Labour voter. She is part of the post-Thatcherite generation, the Labour voters who have never voted in a General Election — the clean-living, aspirational adolescents.

None of her friends drinks. "I've never tasted alcohol," she admits. "I go around with people who don't smoke and are certainly not into drugs. We don't go to clubs; we sit and talk. There are lots of people like that at Cambridge."

She doesn't have a boyfriend, either. "I went out with someone when I was 16, but it was platonic. We went shopping and to football

matches together. I'm not interested in boyfriends or sex. I'm a virgin. The most important thing for me at the moment is my education."

What does she like about Tony Blair? "I don't know much about him," she says. "I'm just drawn to the idea of Labour. The country has been run for so many years by the Conservatives and things haven't been good for the working class."

Her own background is working class. Her parents divorced when she was two. Her father was a carpenter and her mother a beautician. Her roots are half African and half English, "but I prefer not to be categorised by my race," she insists.

We talk about Bruce. Forsyth is married for the third time to former Miss World Wilnelia Merced, 30 years his junior. Would Carley like to marry him? She laughs. "He has the qualities that would make a good

husband. He's funny, entertaining, caring and charming." He has a penchant for beautiful women — has he ever made a pass? "He doesn't flirt with his hostesses. He treats us like daughters. He's a true gentleman."

And what of his rather old-fashioned views? Bruce is ambivalent about homosexuality and he's the sort of man who thinks political correctness the domain of the loony Left. "Well, I wouldn't call the Left loony..." says Carley, pulling her fingers through her hair as she has throughout the interview.

HE ALSO has female stereotypes on his show and can't stand women swearing. And he only reluctantly agreed to introduce a male model on *The Price Is Right*. Carley's reply? "I'm all for equal opportunities," she says carefully.

But isn't it all a bit, well, demeaning? All those ra-ra dresses and 20-inch skirts? "I've only worn two short dresses, and they were just above the knee," Carley assures us.

Would Carley like to be the next Bruce? "I'd prefer to do something more serious," she admits, "such as presenting a programme for teenagers on social issues." She pauses. "But I appreciate the job I've got in television. To be honest, it's not hard smiling, meeting celebrities, going round Bond Street picking nice dresses and being chauffeured to work."

She has done well... hasn't she?