

Is this Britain's sexiest cleric?



COLLARED: Will in Ford's new TV ad

Star of Ford's new ad is simply heavenly

By Caroline Phillips

THE Rev Will Adam, who admits to being a former Avon lady, has just become the Paula Hamilton of the ecclesiastical world.

Paula chucked away her fur coat but kept the keys to her VW. But Will is more worldly — he keeps his dog collar and the keys to his Ford Escort Serenade.

Will, 26, is the Anglican curate of Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, who stars in the new Ford TV ad. On screen he is seen cruising around waving to various women.

"Will Adam has married 14

women since he got his ... " says the voice-over as the camera pans to a dog collar. Fourteen wives! Mon dieu! And there's another double entendre in the line: "Escort. What do you do in yours?" Sacre bleu! We could understand if Will advertised a sustainable development car fuelled with raindrops and love.

But Will is a matinee idol. He has cherubic curls, celestial blue eyes. He is, as they say in some parts, the vicar's knickers. His television appearance has caused a spate of chutney-dropping at the Mothers' Union in Beaconsfield. Real women now wave to him in the street. Strangers talk to him. Ladies flock to him after his sermons.

The matrons of Beaconsfield — a model village and once home to G.K. Chesterton, creator of that other immortal priest, Father Brown — are blushing.

"The ad doesn't do Will's charm justice," sighs Dr Delia Burley, 52, in paisley skirt. "I'm an oldie and very fond of Will. I don't know whether he sets young hearts a-flutter but I hear some very nice comments about him from my patients."

Pam Crawford, a secretary in a floral scarf and sensible skirt, thought the ad enormous fun. "A group of us watched it and clapped afterwards," she reveals.

Flower arranger Margaret Lykiardopoulos says: "It has caused a stir. Will looks natural and lovely."

Will is the first priest in Britain to appear in a television advertisement — unless you count a tourist, who happened to be the Archdeacon of Halifax, getting off a train in a Eurostar commercial. In fact, Will is the first clergyman since 1901 to appear in an advert of any kind. That year a priest featured in a newspaper advertisement sharing the good news about Sanatogen.

I meet the curate for tea during his mission to Whitby, North Yorkshire, where he is escorting a school party. Will, wearing a red anorak and glasses, seems an unlikely sex symbol as he gets off a coach with 26 eight-year-olds.

BUT then he enters the tea room haloed by the hall light and wearing a tartan jacket nice enough to get him through St Peter's gate, no questions asked. He says he's now open to other offers.

When Will got the call (to appear in the ad), he thought it was a joke: He'd been selected by the Church of England's chief broadcasting officer. Will, who had played sprite Puck and fool Touchstone at theological college, wowed them at the screen test. And he loved the shoot, which took 20 hours for a 40-second commercial.

Now he would happily present Songs Of Praise and Top Of The Pops, or be an agony uncle on children's TV. Modelling? "No." Acting? "No." Product endorsement? "Depends." He thinks his ad



WHEELS OF FORTUNE: The Rev Will Adam is open to more offers

presents a positive pastoral message. "A priest in contact with people in their everyday lives."

Will had the other call (from God) when he was 17. "I had a conversion. But I didn't hear voices, bells or choirs." He read theology at Manchester University and then became an Avon lady. "I loved selling cosmetics."

Will met his girlfriend — Lindsay Yates, 26, who is studying for the priesthood — last year in church. "Very Four Weddings And A Funeral — it was at a friend's wedding. We were singing in choir. I fancied her when I saw her."

He believes celibacy in the priesthood is an option but refuses to say whether he adheres. "I could do it if that were my calling." Is the dog collar a lure, Thorn Birds-style, to women? "I've never come across it." And should sex be confined to marriage? "That's the ideal," he says. He would go to a vicars and tarts party. "I'd dress as a tart."

He is not an eccentric, egocentric priest from the pages of a Barbara Pym or Joanna Trollope novel. And he's certainly not a happy-clappy vicar; a Derek-Nimmo-All-Gas-And-Gaiters-style priest (bumbling

fool); or Jane Austen's Mr Collins (a bore). He's "loud and Tiggerish" — an unreconstructed, old-fashioned, middle-class socialist. Concerned about the reunification of the Anglican and Methodist churches and the break-up of the welfare state.

But back to the advert. The reaction of the clergy has been one of mirth. "Nobody has told me I've sold out to the Devil." How much money did he make? "I won't answer that. I gave a large part to a community project."

THE clerical hunk's advert is a new manifestation of the Church's liberal drift. Perhaps also a sexy way to reverse Anglicanism's catastrophic decline and a canny attempt to boost the disastrous finances of the church.

Certainly, miracles have happened since the advert. Will has a new Ford. (He refuses to say what discount Ford gave him.) Local church attendances have increased. "Oh, I forgot to tell you," he says. "I proposed to Lindsay after the advert." Did he propose in the Ford? "No. But I drove there in it." So what do you do in yours?