

THE  TIMES

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18.05.13

Heidi Klum

The model
who became
a mogul

By Tim Teeman

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'I WASN'T THIN ENOUGH OR EDGY ENOUGH'

She has a \$70 million business empire and a TV career – not bad for the 'curvy' model who turns 40 next month. Tim Teeman meets mother of four Heidi Klum



Heidi Klum
photographed
last month
by Rankin

It used to be that Heidi Klum was best known for her body. And it's true to say that the 39-year-old, who first came to international attention with a busty front cover for *Sports Illustrated's* swimsuit issue, and as a lingerie model for Victoria's Secret, still has a body that sells clothes. But she's also known for having one of the best business brains in the industry.

She's the Emmy-nominated face of three top television shows, *Project Runway* (on which she's both presenter and executive producer and gets an estimated \$2.5 million cut of the revenue every year), *America's Got Talent* and *Germany's Next Top Model*. On *Project Runway* she has her own catchphrase, directed at rejected fashion designer contestants, that sounds, ingeniously, both cruel and sympathetic: "One day you're in, the next you're out." There have been deals with the likes of McDonald's and H&M. Now she has her own fashion labels, including a top-selling children's range – Truly Scrumptious by Heidi Klum – with Babies R Us, her own jewellery collection sold on QVC and a range of perfumes (which she makes sure to plug on *Project Runway*).

Today she has already shot the latest campaign for her fitness range for New Balance. Now she's modelling for the *Times* cover shoot.

"I'm working the diapers," Klum shouts as she hitches up the black and white Dolce & Gabbana shorts, profane rap music pounding all around. The din is head-hammeringly murderous. "Heidi likes it loud," I am told. The Los Angeles boxing gym has been transformed. The dog-eared bout posters and punching bags have been displaced by racks of dresses and stray Louboutins. Klum briskly approves the photographs taken by her friend, the English celebrity photographer Rankin. Everything runs the Klum way – with big smiles and brisk changes. "This is great. FUN!" Her accent is Germanic, with a soft "like totally" Californian undertow.

"Modelling is the fun part," she says. "Work for me now is strategising and looking at the numbers... and the markets we're aiming for."

Klum's fortune was estimated at \$50-70 million (£30-45 million) by the business magazine *Forbes* at the start of 2012. Last year, she made \$20 million, way more than Britain's best-known supermodel, Kate Moss, who earned approximately \$9 million, according to *Forbes*. On lists of the world's richest models, Klum is commonly cited as the second highest-earning after Gisele Bündchen. *Forbes* has taken her off their rankings of models, not because she isn't wealthy but because now, in the same vein as Tyra Banks, she is more mogul.

She has always been strategic. Friends

'I was the commercial girl. I knew if I wanted to do cooler things I had to find my own path'



liken her to a great pool player: as she lines up one shot, she's making sure she's set up for the next. Like Bündchen, early in her career Klum realised that modelling had a short shelf life (she was just 20 when she set up a perfume business with her father). Also like Bündchen – and seven of the world's ten richest models – she found early success modelling for Victoria's Secret, the lingerie chain.

Far from the size-zero stars of the catwalk, Victoria's Secret women are athletic, full-figured, healthy-looking, confident. The customer base is resolutely, proudly middle-market, whose lucrative potential Klum, who started out modelling for catalogues, has always instinctively understood.

"I wasn't thin enough, tall enough, edgy enough," she says. "I was always the commercial girl. I did hair campaigns. There were big-name models like Claudia [Schiffer] and Naomi [Campbell] and I understood that if I wanted to do cooler, more creative things I had to find my own path."

The Victoria's Secret gig lasted for 13 years. Tyra Banks advised her to get an entertainment lawyer and showed her how to apply fake eyelashes correctly; Stephanie Seymour showed her how to strut. "I felt like a basketball player on the sidelines, learning from the others." Over her career she's appeared on more than 150 magazine covers.

The photographer, Rankin, says, "She's my favourite model. You'd be surprised how many models don't like posing. She does."

The next morning Klum and I are ensconced in a plush booth, slumped on huge cushions at the Bel-Air Hotel near Klum's home, where she lives with her new partner, former family bodyguard Martin Kristen, and her children, Leni, 8, Henry, 7, Johan, 6, and Lou, 3. She is fresh-faced, barely made-up. She's wearing an all-black ensemble of oversized cardigan with glittery spider on the back, trousers and boots. Her hair is scraped back, revealing a pair of diamond earrings.

She had always wanted to be a dancer and didn't know that it was possible to make a living from modelling until on a whim she entered a televised modelling contest at 18 and won it, beating 30,000 contestants. (It's one of the reasons why her producers say that she makes such a good judge on *Project Runway* – she knows what's at stake.) The prize was a \$300,000 modelling contract.

Klum grew up in Bergisch Gladbach, a town near Cologne. She describes her family as "very normal". Her mother, Erna, was a hairdresser, her father, Günther, a cosmetics company executive. "When I was young my mum would make all my Barbie's clothes and with the scraps make hair scrunchies." Her father would strike her if she did something wrong. "He was pretty strict, like, 'As long as your feet are under my table, you have to



From top: Heidi Klum on the catwalk at a Victoria's Secret show, 2008; with husband Seal in 2005; with Gisele Bündchen, 2005



Marriage? 'I don't think so. I have been there, worn that white dress. I'm happy I don't have to have that again'



listen to what I say.' I was scared of him. That's what the hitting was for."

Does she smack her own children? "That doesn't work in my family. I figure things out by speaking to them. If they ran out into the street or did something really bad, I might give them a smack to give the message they can never do it again." Infractions are punished by having iPad or Wii time restricted. "I listen to their opinion." She laughs. "You always have to hear what their little minds are thinking about."

Nevertheless, life in the Klum household sounds exhaustingly regimented. A wall chart tracks good behaviour (for boys, listening; for girls, doing chores) with a series of crosses against each child's name: "If Johan gets 20 crosses he can go to [fast food outlet] Chuck E. Cheese's with friends. Leni is working towards 100 crosses for a puppy." She sounds like a disciplinarian. "I have four kids.

I have to be, otherwise they rule you because there are more of them. They stick together."

Although she has a nanny, Klum is up at 6am making pancakes and healthy smoothies; if the children drink theirs they each receive \$1, which is deposited in a piggybank. The money is saved to buy toys. "Some parents may think that's wrong, but at least I know they've eaten something healthy. Their lunchboxes [with carrot sticks, turkey sandwiches, yoghurts and Nutella bread] come back empty, so I don't really know what they've eaten. It feels like they earned their money."

Klum drives the children to school at 8am and picks them up at 3.30pm. Any New York filming is done around the school holidays. Sports is "super-important, so they feel part of a team". She has taught them to knit. In the car she encourages them to look out of the windows. "We do not allow movies in the car," she says – so sternly that I nod vigorous assent. "It is hard in our society to make sure that you get them on the right path. All I can do is give them the right tools."

In 2012 Klum's marriage to the singer Seal, biological father of three of her four children, broke up after almost seven years. For a long time it seemed she was one of the few models to pull off having a career and a family. "But you deal with it," she says. "You have to make sure that your kids never suffer, but to a certain extent I'm sure they might do, unknowingly." When they ask about the break-up she is honest and direct: "Seal was always travelling, so while it is different there's not much difference. I always say I'm a Gemini – there's two of me. I don't know how it works; it just does."

Does she love her boyfriend, the former bodyguard? "Yes, I do. I think love is very important. It's beautiful to be in love," she replies. The couple have been photographed wearing matching Tiffany bands. Will she

marry again? “I don’t think so. It’s not that important to me any more. I’ve been married before. When I got married the first time [to first husband Ric Pipino in 1997] I was 23 and it was always this dream to get married and wear this white dress. I was married for six years and it didn’t work out. I see a lot of girls now, 30 years old, looking for a man. They want to get married, they want this big ring, and I love that and I love that they feel that way. It’s the fairytale dream that 70 per cent of girls have. But I have been there, worn this dress, dreamt that dream. I’m happy now that I don’t have to have that again.”

Her father told her she was too young to marry Pipino. “I thought I was old enough and knew what I was doing, but definitely I was too young. Rick was 14 years older and we grew apart. But everything is an experience. I don’t say: ‘This was terrible.’” So divorce wasn’t devastating? Klum grimaces. “It’s not great. It’s not what I wanted. I always got married because of love. I tried and tried and it didn’t work out and we drifted apart.” Klum sighs. “Then I had this beautiful family with Seal.”

They got together in 2004 after the break-up of her relationship with Italian businessman (and Leni’s father) Flavio Briatore. Seal officially adopted Leni in 2009 and Klum and Seal held annual wedding ceremonies during their marriage. “I loved getting married every year. I also thought that was something that would hold us together, the glue. I thought it was good for us, good for the children.”

Klum and Seal experienced racism from both sides during their relationship. “For me, I don’t see colour; I look at people for who they are. But there are white racists and black racists.” What was it like? “Anyone who gets a finger pointed at them, regardless of whether it’s about the size of their body or colour, it’s never a great position to be in. It’s even harder when they do it to your children.” What does she tell them? “To not listen. To not get bullied. To understand there are nice people and some angry people and to stay clear of that.”

There’s “a whole long list of things” behind why Klum’s marriage to Seal failed, which she declines to itemise. “We are OK with each other. Obviously we are not the best of friends or we would still be together.” Klum laughs. “But it’s manageable.” Seal is now based in Australia.

Have two divorces put her off marrying again? “It’s the whole constitution of it; I don’t feel like it’s necessarily part of my life right now. I don’t feel an urgency, the anxiety, to have a husband or me having to be a wife.”

What if her boyfriend asked her? “I don’t think he will. He’s been with my family for five years. I’ve known him for a long time. He’s a great guy. I just met him recently in a completely different way. We’re taking it one day at a time.” Is he still their bodyguard? “I think he will always be protecting me and the family.”

‘Zero is not a good number. Models need to ask themselves if they want the jobs that badly’



Was it challenging or odd, the professional relationship becoming personal? “No, it transformed naturally,” says Klum. “He’s a very loving person, a normal guy. He’s not complicated; nothing is a problem for him. He’s a great man.” Does she want to have children with him? “I don’t really want to have more children. Four is a lot of children and I feel complete. I feel like when I look around the dinner table we are complete. This is our family. He’s very good with the kids. They love him; they’ve known him for a long time.”

Sex for Klum is “important if you like it; if you don’t like it it’s not important”. She smiles. Does she like it? “I do,” she laughs, adding, “It’s always good to be creative and, most importantly, do it.” She says, “You can be a mum during the day, make pancakes, then in the evening do your make-up, put on heels and a cute dress in 20 minutes. It’s fun for a woman to play different parts. I like feeling sexy.”

At her early castings Klum was told she was too big for sample sizes, but this didn’t lead to an eating disorder. “I just learnt that I couldn’t eat muffins and spaghetti bolognese every day, like the girl bought up by Erna and Günther. I had to have great hair, great nails. I had to stop picking my pimples. I had to have enough sleep and be on time.

“I’m not a nun – I have a glass of wine with dinner and drink with my girlfriends. But

I don’t know how some people do it. Maybe it’s the German in me – I have to be clear, to know what I am doing. I was never into the party scene. I was too ambitious doing castings.”

The size-zero debate frustrates her. “I don’t understand how anything can be a zero. Zero is not a good number. If I was a fashion label I would not go that thin. I would promote girls who are a little more feminine, with curves. They don’t necessarily have to be a plus size, just healthy young women. Models need to ask themselves if they want the jobs that badly. Some girls are naturally thin; others don’t eat and that’s unhealthy.” On *Germany’s Next Top Model*, in which she shows the contestants how to cook healthily, she speaks out if she thinks they’re too thin.

After doing fashion reports for a showbiz programme, Klum’s big TV break, *Project Runway*, began in 2004. “Even now it takes legwork. I still have to give it my all,” Klum says. She wants to refresh the format but won’t say how, “or people will copy us”. She has been approached to host her own daily talk show, but declined: “I wouldn’t like it. It would be too much like going to an office.”

Klum turns 40 in a few weeks. “It’s the way it is,” she shrugs. “Ageing is part of life, although in this industry everyone worries so much about it. I never saw my modelling career as having an end date.” She dyes her hair blonde every three weeks; being a natural brunette, “the roots grow really fast”. She runs and swims. She says she hasn’t had cosmetic surgery. “I’d rather look and feel my age than try to be something I’m not. I’m not going to do this [she pulls her face back]. It isn’t me.” Can she envision having it in the future? “Maybe. I don’t know how I’ll feel in five years. I’ve nothing against it. Everyone has to feel good about themselves. I’ve come close.” At her dermatologist’s, where she has her face “cleaned” (“They push my pimples out using a needle”), they ask: “Do you want a little this or that?” I say no. It’s a fear of not being me, of suddenly turning into this plastic thing. I want my forehead to move.” Klum laughs. “My mother says I talk with my forehead, which makes my wrinkles worse.”

Her ego seems remarkably in check. Klum knows her worth, yet – rare for a celebrity – does not whinge about fame, but simply makes the most of opportunities she has created for herself. The paparazzi follow her and the children to the park, “and that disturbs the other families, which upsets me, but what can I do? We can’t just stay in the house.” They take photographs “that show Henry yelling and say he is unhappy, but he’s just a kid yelling.” Klum laughs, looks at her watch. “It is 10.45,” she says. “Martin will be outside. I must go.”

Nothing gets in the way of the Klum schedule, or – you sense – in the way of Heidi Klum. ■