

The Express on Sunday
Hungry cougars circle the boys
BEVERLY GLICK
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Review - Urban Cougars are a newish breed of single, independent, 'more mature' women chasing young bucks. BEVERLY GLICK explored the fad more closely - and got caught up in a stampede of willing lads

A FUNNY thing happened when I turned 50 earlier this year. Far from slowing down to a pace of life in which cocoa and slippers feature prominently, I threw caution to the wind. My "what the hell, I'm going for it" rebirth led me to such youthful pastures as social networking site MySpace and it was there that I realised, to my surprise, that there were young men out there searching for mature females.

Then I discovered that there was a new breed of sophisticated, financially independent single older woman, known as the urban cougar, who had made it her mission to aggressively pursue younger men.

The phenomenon originated on the New York dating scene, where fiercely successful female Manhattanites took to stalking their prey, known as cubs. Cougar icons include Kim Cattrall (whose Samantha in Sex And The City inspired the phenomenon in the first place) and Demi Moore (now married to cub Ashton Kutcher, who is 15 years her junior).

The cougar is now about to go mainstream thanks to two new films. The cougar is mentioned in Ocean's 13 as Matt Damon is tasked with seducing powerful older woman Ellen Barkin.

Then there's new movie The Cougar Club, about a couple of college graduates who start a club for younger men devoted to older women and starring Faye Dunaway and Carrie Fisher.

It premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and will be released later this year.

In the UK, a survey by the Parship dating website recently revealed that the number of female "cradle-snatchers" (women over 45 seeking younger men) had risen to almost 10 per cent; five per cent of single men between the ages of 25 and 35 said they were looking for an older woman and 47 per cent said age was not an issue.

With this in mind, I decided, as an old, free and single woman, to find out what it was like to join the British cougar hunt and enrolled with two dating websites specifically designed for the May/December relationship - GoCougar. com and toyboywarehouse. com.

GoCougar announces: "Feel comfortable with the possibility of starting an age-gap relationship in a community where people think just like you." It's free to sign up so, armed with a recent photograph that could best be described as a little "come hither", I began my debut safari.

I put up my profile at 2pm ("Nifty at 50 seeks fun and adventure") and by 5pm had received 29 messages from young men, ranging from a 23-year-old Muslim from Jeddah to a 17-year-old college boy from America (whose message simply said: "Omg ur hot."). So it seems I didn't have to aggressively pursue my prey at all, they were willingly venturing into my grasp.

Checking out some of their profiles, I began to learn what was motivating them. "What I'm looking for is an open-minded woman who understands what she wants and thinks. I find older women more attractive than younger because they know what life's all about, " announced one.

"I am looking for a wildly inappropriate, passionate affair with a confident, attractive and even demanding older woman, " said a startlingly handsome David Beckham lookalike and part-time

lifeguard (in the US, sadly).

SOME of the messages I received were unfailingly polite, some forward, others faltering. Most offered their personal e-mail addresses and invited me for a live "chat" on an internet messaging service.

Tim, 22, seemed different, though. He had just moved to London from Yorkshire to start a new job and told me: "You look like an all-round interesting person and someone who I would probably be intimidated by."

I decided to have a chat with Tim online to see exactly what had prompted him to approach a woman 28 years his senior.

"I'm not sure, " he replied. "I saw the website mentioned in a free newspaper and thought I'd give it a go." He asked if I was a fan of younger men and I confessed that, once you hit 50, older men start to look very old indeed.

"So how about a 22-year-old?" he inquired.

"Would you be willing to go that young?"

I replied that it would take quite a leap of imagination, given that I was the editor of a magazine before he was born and have owned a property for as long as he's been alive.

"Yes, but I think that lends an element of excitement!" he insisted. "I like older women for all the 'usual' reasons - maturity, experience, different priorities and I really like trying new things."

I pointed out that I was an old thing rather than a new thing but this did not seem to deter him. It didn't take long for him to start asking me the sort of questions a young man would never dare ask an older woman if he met her but then he willingly revealed details of his sexual experience that I imagine would make his mother faint.

Michael, a 24-year-old fitness fanatic from the Midlands, started off asking questions about my job but quickly moved on to inquire about my "vices". I asked him the same question as Tim. What did he find attractive about the mature female? "I find them easier to chat to, less complicated. Girls of my age become clingy and more dependent.

"You meet different kinds of woman on sites like this. If we were in a pub I doubt I would approach you, or vice versa."

Other men I chatted to confirmed the theme:

older women are more open, honest, more sensual, less demanding, know what they want and are more independent than girls of their age. Clearly it helped in this context not to have a ticking biological clock or an urge to "settle down" - and I suspect that many of these men were just indulging a Mrs Robinson-esque fantasy. " OVER AT toyboywarehouse. com, a London online dating service for "gorgeous women and younger men", Lance, 28, was busy showing off his six-pack and cheeky grin. Surely, I thought, a man like this would have to ask women his age to form a queue.

"I am very picky, " he replied, "and I prefer mature women. They have so much more to offer: sophistication, intellect, confidence.

When I was 17, my lover was 36."

However, I received the most intelligent insight from a 32-year-old actor called Roy:

"Personally I like the shifted dynamic of the woman being older as it plays with the male viewer, female viewed, thing and also it feels slightly transgressive. There's something about being with someone with a lot more successes under their belt, confidence and experience that is quite attractive."

Joining the urban cougar society certainly made me realise that a woman does not pass her sell-by date when she reaches the half-century.

Quite the contrary, in fact - she has more currency and power than ever before, if she is prepared to use it, and a stream of young men waiting to pay homage at her feet.

Grrrr. . . I'm sharpening my claws!

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