

# hit single

■ The inside of Courteney Cox's trailer – on the set of a new Wes Craven horror movie, *Scream* – is pretty messy. At least by her standards. Not that there is any crumpled underwear on the floor, or corn chips ground into the carpet or anything. But still, a few things are out of place. There are, for example, denim jeans tossed, *not folded*, across the sofa next to an open script with pages that are actually *bent*. There are stockings on the table, and get this – they are *out of their pack*. And on the floor is a pair of shoes. And although they are next to each other, one shoe is upright, and *the other is not*. What a complete hellhole.

"Now," she says, a note of triumph in her voice, "look at

my room. Would you say this is the room of a neat freak? So can we squelch that rumour?"

Maybe. Maybe not. "It was probably staged," jokes one of her best friends, composer and studio musician Rick Marotta. "She probably had one of the prop guys come in and show her how to mess up a room."

Taunts from her friends notwithstanding, Cox is trying, perhaps a little too hard, to prove that she isn't what people think, that she isn't Little Miss Can't Be Wrong. Just turned 32 and single since her relationship with actor Michael Keaton ended last spring, Cox is tired of reading how much she resembles the character she plays on *Friends*, that she's compulsively neat, just like

She's like everybody's big sister: strong, compassionate, honest, but the star of *Friends* is absolutely *not*, she says, obsessed. Well, as Joe Rhodes discovered, maybe a *little* bit.

Monica. That she's organised. Just like Monica. That she plays mother hen to her cast mates. Just like Monica.

"I'm not a neat freak," she says again, emphatically. "And I'm *not* obsessed."

Well, actually, she is. A little bit, anyway. Obsessed with disproving the notion that she's obsessed, that she's an exercise junkie or a sweet addict, or – and this tabloid rumour really makes her crazy – that she has an eating disorder.

"Courteney has a lot of sides," says Tom Selleck, who has worked with her on *Friends*. "She's very strong, which I find attractive. And she can be brutally frank, which I also kind of like. But I think she also has a vulnerable side that

## Why Courteney Cox is sudd



only everyone's best friend

she's not quick to show people," he adds. "People think they know me," Cox says more than once, "and they don't."

It's as if she feels trapped by the parts that have made her famous: the nice, sweet, oh-so-steady girl-next-door that has been her trademark since Bruce Springsteen pulled her on stage in his 1984 video *Dancing In The Dark*. That stereotype was perpetuated from 1987 to 1989, when she played Michael J Fox's girlfriend on the last two seasons of *Family Ties*. And in 1994's *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, her most prominent film role to date, she was the one playing it straight while co-star Jim Carrey contorted himself all over the screen.

Which is why, instead of signing on for the kind of mainstream romantic comedy many people would have expected from her, Cox has chosen to spend this summer's break from *Friends* working for Craven (creator of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*) making a psycho-thriller in California.

In the film *Scream*, Cox plays an unscrupulous tabloid-television reporter trying to build her reputation by covering the story of a serial killer. Cox's character is selfish, manipulative and scheming – and ends up screaming and covered in blood. About as far away from Monica as you can get.

"All you have to do is meet her," says Craven, when asked why he cast a sitcom sweetheart in such an out-of-character role. "She's very sharp, she's got a sense of humour, and she's got a lot of edge."

Before *Scream*, Cox made *Commandments* opposite Aidan Quinn, a movie she describes as a "strange, dark religious fable". She shot the film in New York on weekends and on breaks in her sitcom schedule, shuttling back and forth on flights across the country at all



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hours in the morning, often going from the gut-wrenching emotions of *Commandments* to the lighthearted laughter of *Friends*, often with only 12 hours between them.

"I like to be going in all directions at once. The busier I am, the more focused I am," she says. This, say Cox's friends, is the only tabloid-reported personality trait that isn't a myth.

"I have the ability to do about 50 things at once," Cox says with no-bragging-just-the-facts directness. So she is constantly dashing from one project to another ("like a hummingbird," she admits), consumed for the moment and then off in another direction.

She recently sold a house for US\$1.1million (a US\$150,000 profit) and immediately spent US\$2million on another, which she is already deep in the throes of renovating. "I can't explain it," she says of her compulsion to buy houses, refurbish them just as she wants and then start all over again.

"I need to change constantly. I get bored quickly," she says.

It's a trait she believes goes back to her childhood. Cox grew up in the country-club suburbs of Birmingham in Alabama, from all appearances the perfect little Southern belle. But the enforced politeness of Southern life was as stifling as the Alabama heat.

"There are so many great things about the South," she says, "but it wasn't for me. To me, time is too precious to walk around on eggshells, so I'll just get things off my chest. And that's not the Southern way."

Cox, the youngest of four children (two sisters, Virginia and Dottie; and one brother, Richard), was 10 when her parents divorced. Her father, Richard, was gregarious, a risk taker. Her mother, after whom Courteney was named, was more serious. She inherited

both traits. Even though Cox remained close to both parents and came to understand why they were better off apart, their break-up was painful for her.

"My father, when you were with him, gave you so much attention," she says, the little girl audible in her voice. "It might only last for a minute, but for that minute you felt like you were the greatest thing that ever hit earth. But then he was gone. I didn't want the time with my father to end."

By 1976, two years after the divorce, both parents were remarried and, with nine stepchildren added to the mix, Cox found herself struggling even harder to get attention. She stayed in Birmingham with her mother, but became more and more independent and slightly rebellious.

"I think because my parents did get divorced, I felt there were a lot of things I had to accomplish," she says of the drive that eventually propelled her out of Birmingham and into the world of show business.

Intending to be an architect, Cox enrolled at her mother's old college in Washington, in 1982. But the summer before her first year, she took the advice of her stepfather's brother, Miles Copeland Sr, whose three sons – Miles Jr, president of IRS Records; Ian, head of FBI, New York's most cutting-edge rock and roll booking agency; and Stewart, the drummer for and co-founder of The Police – had become the music industry's hippest movers and shakers.

"You gotta get out of Birmingham," Miles Sr told her. "You need to go to New York."

So she did. She wanted to be a model and she was hoping Ian Copeland could help.

"We were impressed by her guts," Copeland says, recalling this first encounter with his 18-year-old Alabama stepcousin.

Miles Jr's considerable clout got Cox in the door at New York's Ford modelling agency. The modelling led to commercials and the commercials to parts on soap operas. She took speech lessons to lose her accent, acting lessons to lose her fear.

Her relationship with her stepcousin Ian, 15 years her senior, had by then turned romantic. They went out for nearly three years. "She was incredibly mothering, very possessive and very take-charge," Copeland remembers.

Taking care of the people around her is something Cox has always done. "She's like everybody's big sister," says Rick Marotta.

He tells the story of when Jennifer Keohane, a mutual friend, was seriously injured in a car accident, "Courtney was at the hospital every single day. If anything is ever wrong, she's there for you." Hmm. Sounds like a line from a familiar song.

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her senior.

The audition that would transform her life came in the spring of 1984, a cattle call that Cox saw no differently than hundreds of others she'd been on. "There were tons of people there," she says of the Springsteen *Dancing In The Dark* video. "Lots of dancers, these great long-legged women, and I'm wearing jeans and sneakers, and I went, 'Whoa, I'm in the wrong place.'"

She was stunned to get the part of one of the swooning fans and even more amazed to discover that she would be the one dancing with the Boss on stage.

But there she was with her big grin and tomboy short black hair, swinging her blue-jeaned hips all over MTV. It changed everything.

In 1985 she was cast in her first prime-time series, NBC's *Misfits Of Science* which moved her out to California. She got the *Family Ties* part in 1987, in spite of the fact she'd never

done comedy before. "She learned very quickly," remembers Gary David Goldberg, the producer, "and from an audience standpoint, they like her."

When *Family Ties* closed shop in 1989, Cox had offers to do other television series but opted instead for feature films and, as she says, "happened to make some bad choices." Her resume in the years between *Family Ties* and *Friends* is not exactly filled with classics. The string of near misses and not-quite-right castings might have continued had Cox not lobbied hard for the part of Monica Geller on *Friends*.

"They thought I seemed too vulnerable to play Monica," she says, laughing at the idea. "And I went, 'Then you don't know me *at all*.'"

But Cox's lack of star-making roles prior to *Friends* wasn't all bad luck. "There was a huge period in my life where my love life was the most ▶ 193

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100 ◀ important thing." Cox is quick to stress that she's not necessarily talking about Michael Keaton when she says this, but the years during which she was out of the spotlight do coincide with the early years of their relationship. They started dating in 1989 and they were a couple for nearly six years. Since their well-reported break-up, there have been flurries of rumours about possible reconciliations. But the only thing she'll say is "that it's too important to talk about in public."

She is, however, willing to talk about why she's been attracted to certain kinds of men, particularly older ones. (Michael Keaton is 44.)

"I love to be challenged and to learn from people," she says, explaining why she's rarely drawn to men her own age. She loves men who are agile mentally and physically. "Someone who's not, like, tripping all the time," she says.

"I used to think there's only one person for everybody. But as you get older, you just realise there's a lot more give-and-take in relationships."

She sounds tired. This has been her first day on the set of *Scream*, and in addition to the nervous tensions of working with an unfamiliar cast and crew, she has spent most of the evening getting punched in the face by *Party Of Five*'s Neve Campbell. No wonder she hasn't put away her shoes.

"I used to think if a man was weak ... ooh, I didn't like it at all," Cox says sleepily. "I want them to be strong and able to handle things. To handle me. But now I realise that it's OK for a man to be insecure."

Courtney Cox spends the rest of the evening talking about how much calmer her life has been lately. Maybe, she says, she'll keep this new house for a while. She seems grateful that she'll be away from Los Angeles for a few months. She wants to visit wineries, browse in antique stores. Waste time.

She used to think that she'd be a failure if she turned 30 and wasn't married with children. She still wants those things, still expects to have a family, hopefully when she's 40. But, maybe for the first time in her life, Courtney Cox says she isn't in a hurry. ☑