

REAL MEN REVEAL

◀ her, but it's definitely a struggle. And when he and I get together, it's usually at my place, to listen to music and drink beer. I always get the impression it's the happiest he's been for a while.

10 We can tell if you NEED US

By the time I met my wife, the gut-reaction lessons I had learned had made me pretty sharp. Yet I was immediately mystified by her. She stood alone on the deck of a ferry boat, laden with camera equipment, wearing blue nylon raingear. Then she turned around and I saw her face. She was beautiful but something was wrong – she wasn't smiling. So I walked up and said, "That's a professional camera, right?" Although this may well be the lamest opening line ever, she managed a polite smile. It wasn't sexy or flirty – it was wary, and she stood completely still. She'd shown me her vulnerable side, and I instantly knew I'd met a woman who might be creative, competent and independent, but who also – and this was just a hopeful guess – might want a supportive partner by her side.

Everything in her face crushed my vow from years before never to fall blindly in love again. And much of what I felt about my wife in those first moments has proved true. Since then I have spent no small amount of energy trying to understand what's at the root of that vulnerability. But I've also had to grapple with a few things that I never would have suspected – her perverse sense of humour, for example, and her pornographic taste in wedding gifts. Wish I'd seen *that* one coming.

Now it's your turn...

25 ways to tell if *he's* worth the effort

A first date is your relationship in miniature, so pay attention, says love expert **Lauren Henderson**

Experience has taught me that men make very bad liars. And more often than not, we deliberately blind ourselves to the signs a man lets slip, which tell us that he's a mummy's boy or a commitment-phobe. I know I've been so keen on a man, or so keen just to date someone, that I've ignored plenty of the signals that should have sent me running – or made me realise he really *was* worth bothering with. So ladies, after many hard years in the dating trenches, here are the signs I recommend you look out for.

BAD SIGNS

1 He's tighter than two coats of paint

If a nice guy likes you, he'll want to treat you – not always, but on the first few dates at least. Sorry if this sounds sexist, but it's true. Every single man who's ever been serious about me has insisted on paying, and rightly so.

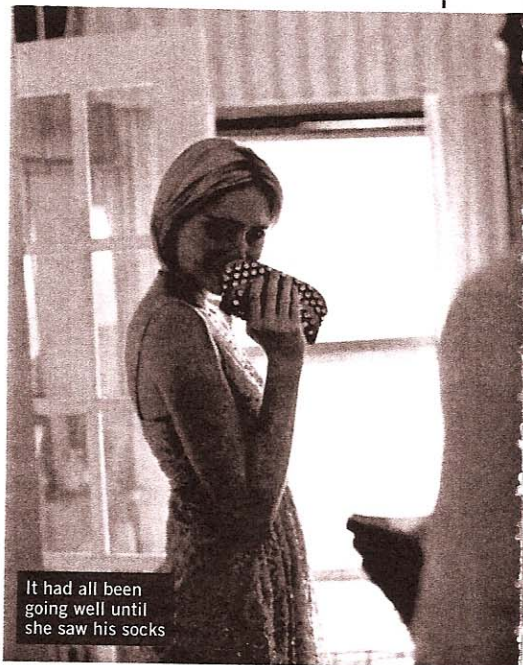
2 He talks about his mum non-stop

Whether it's love ("She's the best mum ever. No one makes cheese on toast quite like she

does") or hate ("She abandoned me as a child. Sometimes I wonder if that's why I've never been able to trust a woman") doesn't matter. With this man, it's buy one, get one free – a deal you should find easy to turn down.

3 He wears acrylic football shirts and hasn't been to the hairdresser's for years

This man doesn't care what he looks like and probably never will. Don't think you can transform him either, because you can't. Think about it. He's single ►



It had all been going well until she saw his socks

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◀ and looking for love – and this is his best effort? It's not going to get any better. Dating a man who dresses this badly will mean a lifetime of frustration and personal humiliation at formal events.

4 He flirts with the waitress as much as he's flirting with you

I call these men 'toxic flirts', because they have to make *everyone* love them. Do you want to be the latest entry on a long list? Or do you want a husband who cheats on you? Didn't think so.

5 He's gay

Learn to tell the difference between sexual attraction and friendship. I was chatted up by a guy in a bar once who was giving me mixed signals: he was so nice and friendly, but although he was asking me out, something didn't ring true. Then I put my bag on the bar and he said, "Oooh, killer bag! I *love* fake fur!" Only then did the penny drop.

6 He shows you photos of his children

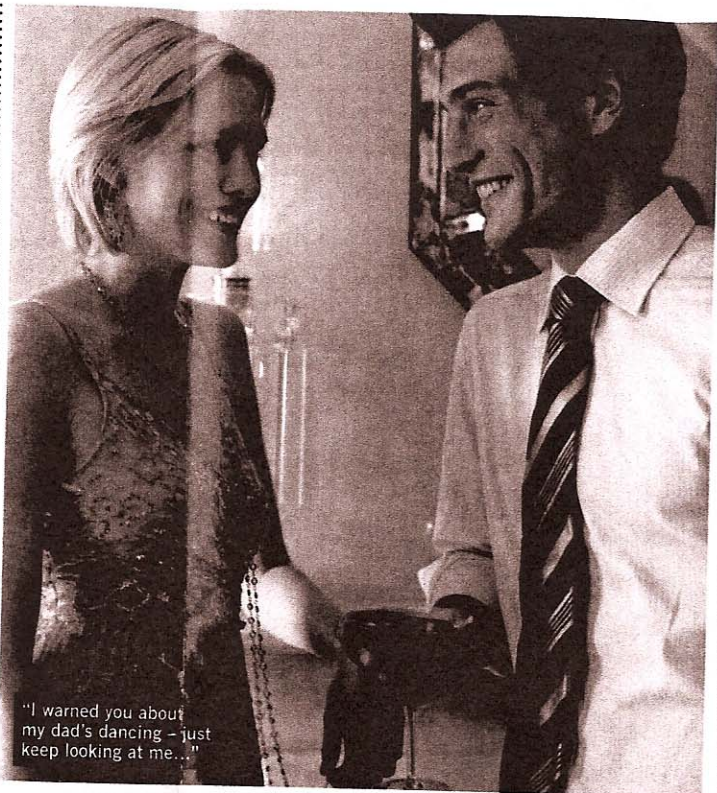
This is *way* too much information the first time you meet him. The only thing worse? A short videophone reel of his cats.

7 He smells wrong

Too much aftershave? Not enough deodorant? Doesn't really matter why. No one ever lasts with a boyfriend whose neck they don't love to sniff on a regular basis. But if he smells right, you'll fancy him forever.

8 He takes medication in front of you

This happened to a friend of mine; not only did her date



pop two pills over dinner – he refused to tell her what they were for. He could at least have *tried* to come up with something plausible.

9 He talks solely to your breasts

I reckon even Page 3 models find this annoying after a while.

10 He watches the TV screen in the bar over your shoulder

Fact: if he doesn't find you more interesting than the TV now, in a year's time he won't listen to a single word you say.

11 He has weird control issues

My friend Jenny went out to lunch with Gavin, a guy she'd met through work. It was a very

nice lunch until their cappuccinos arrived and Gavin pulled out a shaker of cinnamon. "I love cinnamon," he explained, "and sometimes restaurants don't serve it with any, so I carry some around with me." She might just have tolerated this if he hadn't put it back in his bag without offering her any.

12 He has a beard

Call me shallow but it's just a no-no. Even Brad Pitt looked rubbish with a beard.

13 He's rushing you

You only just met, but he's talking about restaurants you can visit together, films you could see, even countries you could go to. Whoa! Either he's desperate – which is tremendously ▶

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◀ unattractive in a man – or he's trying to con you by talking about the future so you'll sleep with him faster in the present.

14 He's carrying a guitar

Guys in bands make appalling boyfriends. Either they're touring all the time and you can't see them for the groupies, or they're unsuccessful, moan about it constantly and are perpetually skint. Neither option's very appealing, is it?

15 He's chatting you up to make his girlfriend jealous

You meet him at a party. He seems perfect. He does everything right. But after an hour, when you're thinking there might be something great starting between you, a girl appears and slides her arm through his, and you realise you were just a pawn in his game.

GOOD SIGNS

16 There's an electric shock the first time your eyes meet

Relish it – you can't fake that.

17 He looks like you

Obviously you don't want to date your twin, but if he's a Pete Doherty skinny-boy-rock-band type, while you're more of a classy chick... well, a long-term relationship needs more compatibility than that. My boyfriend is on first-name terms with the sales guys at Selfridges – and like me, he dresses up when we go out. It's not being vain, and it's not about race or class; it's about your core values being the same. And you're going to need

that during those tough moments that every relationship has.

18 He doesn't wear white socks

Except with trainers. When he's going for a run.

19 He talks nicely about his exes

Ask a guy as early on as you can about his ex-girlfriends. "They were all bitches just after my money," is not a good sign. "They were lovely girls and I'm still on good terms with some of them," is.

20 He asks you about yourself

"What kind of music do you like?" right up to, "What are your hopes and dreams?" show that this guy will be a partner, lover and a friend.

21 He pays you compliments

Women need a lot of compliments. We lap them up. And we like them specific. Not just, "You look lovely tonight," but, "Those shoes make your legs look fantastic!" If he can provide these as soon as you meet – when he's still keen to impress – it's a good sign that he'll keep them coming in the future.

22 When he touches you it's sexy

Touching your arm to emphasise a point he's making, perhaps even moving a lock of hair off your face... these are all good. They let you know he's attracted to you. Putting a hand on your

back to 'guide' you through a room or squeezing your thigh as you're sitting on a bar stool – these might be signs that he's going to treat you like a piece of property.

23 He's looking for a serious relationship

How do you know? Ask him. The Americans do this early on and it's not a bad idea. If you get a sincere, "Yes, if I meet the right person," you're onto a potentially good thing. It won't be difficult to tell if he's lying either – if he's not looking for love, the panic on his face will speak volumes.

Showing you pictures of his children on the first date is *way* too much information. The only thing worse? A videophone reel of his cats

24 He makes fun of himself

Men know women want a man who can make them laugh, so that's what he'll try to do as soon as you two start talking. But are his jokes about himself or other people? That's a really telling test of his character. A man who takes the mickey out of himself will be much more loyal to you, long term, than one who jokes about others behind their backs.

25 He's clean

Unless he's your car mechanic, he should always have clean hands. ☺

Lauren Henderson is a bestselling writer and author of *Jane Austen's Guide To Dating*. (Headline, £9.99)

