

**SUPPORTING ROLE:** 'Catherine' in Australia plays the perfect consort to Wills

Picture: CHRIS JACKSON/Getty



# Please, just be your wonderful self, Kate

**I**SN'T it ironic that the most interesting photographs to have been taken of the Duchess of Cambridge Down Under were the ones you didn't see? There were all those pictures of a hand-shaking, tree-planting, royal-waving Kate and yet it was the paparazzi shots of the Duchess on a day off with Prince George that proved by far the most insightful.

The images, which the British press agreed not to publish on the request of Kensington Palace (despite them being all over the Australian media and great PR for the couple) showed a carefree Kate carrying her son on her shoulders, playing "row, row your boat" with the nine-month-old and even jumping up and clicking her heels together in mid air during a walk with William.

The Duchess doing a Dick Van Dyke? Google it if you don't believe me. Though I would not blame you if you did not because "heel-clicking Kate" is not the Duchess we often get to see. Instead we mostly get "official Kate" (let's call her Catherine), the so-called "plastic" princess Hilary Mantel described as being "designed by committee and built by craftsmen".

"Catherine" is the coiffured, "nice to meet you" clothes horse who minds her Ps and Qs. "Kate" is the social-smoking, topless-sunbathing Master of the Arts whose reaction to being dumped by the world's most eligible bachelor was to get papped

**The Royals have done a wonderful job in moulding Kate Middleton into the Duchess of Cambridge but, Royal Editor CAMILLA TOMINEY wonders, have they thrown away their best asset at the same time?**

outside Mahiki wearing her most risqué dress to date to show him what he was missing.

Catherine looks like a Stepford Wife; Kate is anything but.

So, will the real Duchess of Cambridge please stand up? While she reserves the right to have both a public and private persona, what complicates matters is the fact that so many young girls now see Kate as a role model.

The crowds who turned out in New Zealand and Australia were not the middle-aged, monarchists of yesteryear but a new generation of wannabe princesses in plastic tiaras. While it may have been acceptable in years gone by for princesses to be seen and not heard, in the 21st century they need to have substance as well as style.

Window dressing is all well and good but people are increasingly starting to wonder, what is Kate actually selling? Part of the problem is that we have heard so little from her, even since she married William in 2011.

Indeed, the first time many people had heard her voice was when her exchange of vows rang out in Westminster Abbey.

Despite being quietly confident in almost every other aspect of her life, the Duchess becomes a nervous wreck whenever a microphone is within easy reach. She fluffed her lines at a National Portrait Gallery Gala in February (some might argue because she used her Catherine voice rather than her Kate one) and as a result she leaves the oratory to William.

Which is a great shame, because as her much lamented absence at a star-studded Ralph Lauren-sponsored event at Windsor Castle on Tuesday night proved, most people would probably prefer to hear what she has to say than her husband.

For in between the Catherine-esque "have you come fars" and "what are you doing for Easter", there were flashes of the real Kate on the recent tour that suggest she is far from the plastic princess of Mantel's essay. Asking whether alpaca wool could be turned into a wig for a balding husband ("You need it more than me," she joked) and flashing him an L for loser sign after beating him in a yachting race ranked among her highlights.

The real reason we need to hear more from Kate though, is because it is she who is undoubtedly the power behind the future throne (not the Catherine once dubbed Waity Katy). Just as one gets the sense that it is Carol-with-an-e who wears the trousers in the Middleton marriage, when it comes to Kate, the apple does not fall far from the tree. What

other kind of woman could possibly get a future king crawling back to her with his tail between his legs within three months? Moreover, as the Sunday Express reported last week, Kate has succeeded in making William a better man, mature, mellow and magisterial, the same effect fellow "commoner" Camilla has had on Charles.

She has arguably played a supporting role for long enough. Forget being in the wings, it is time for Kate to spread her wings. She could do worse than taking a leaf out of the

**'Flashes of the real Kate suggest that she is far from being a plastic princess'**

book of her Australian counterpart Mary, Crown Princess of Denmark, who is to royalty what Angelina Jolie is to celebrity.

Also a combination of beauty and brains, this Tasmania-born daughter of a Scottish professor met Frederik, heir apparent to the Danish throne, at a pub in Sydney when the prince was visiting for the 2000 Olympics. Theirs was the original fairytale romance come true and they are now living happily ever after with four children in Copenhagen.

Although like Kate, Mary had to give up her career once the prince had put a ring on it

(she used to work in advertising), the 42-year-old has reinvented herself as a major player on the world stage.

As well as working with charities in Denmark and Australia, Danish and French-speaking Mary has become patron of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund and also has her own Foundation (rather than sharing one with her husband and brother-in-law, as Kate does).

Last week Mary was made honorary patron of her alma mater as part of Tasmania University's 125th anniversary celebrations. It would be good to see Kate doing something equally cerebral.

Admittedly Mary celebrated her 10th wedding anniversary on Wednesday while Kate is only three years into the job but there is no reason why the Duchess could not carve out a similar role for herself.

Intelligent, quick-witted, self-deprecating, attentive and compassionate, Kate's USP is her likeability, a rare commodity not often found in beautiful women in the public eye. She has every reason to be a show-off and yet she isn't one; the perfect female role model in this self-obsessed celebrity era.

Yet despite the unassuming self-belief that has helped her to cope so admirably with the spotlight so far, there is still a sense we are getting to see only a fraction of what the Duchess has to offer.

Behind the glossy hair, carefully applied make-up and haute couture clothes Catherine wears, it is the real Kate who could prove to be the jewel in the crown.



Picture: GETTY

RELAXED: Kate lets her hair down in Oz

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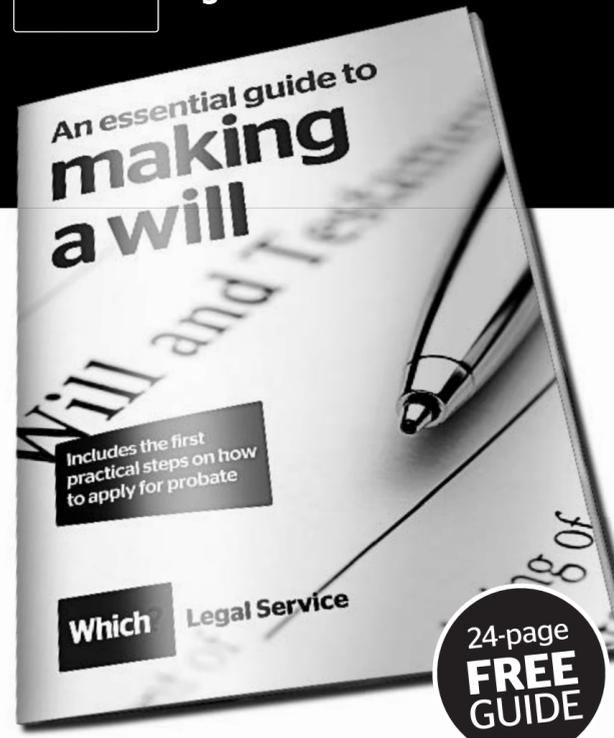
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