

MODEL MUM VIVIENNE CONNOLLY WITH HER BEAUTIFUL FAMILY

VIP

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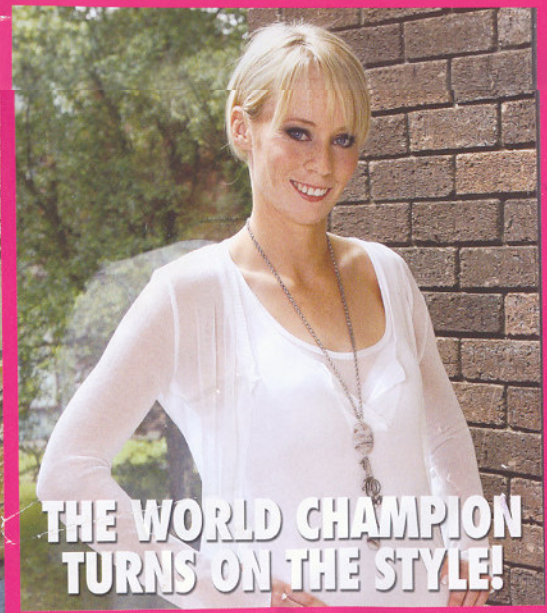
EXCLUSIVE

**THE IRISH CONTESTANTS
FOR THE 2007**

ROSE OF TRALEE

DERVAL O'ROURKE

**TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME
IN A STUNNING PHOTOSHOOT**



**THE WORLD CHAMPION
TURNS ON THE STYLE!**



EXCLUSIVE "I'M NOT A PLAYBOY!" SAYS EDDIE IRVINE



THE NINE IRISH CONTESTANTS OF THE 2007

ROSE OF TRALEE

**POSE TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME,
AND SHARE WITH US THEIR HOPES FOR
THE WORLD FAMOUS FESTIVAL**

Pictured in the Fels Point Hotel, Rose Laura Costelloe, Fermanagh Rose, Laura Howell, The Cork, Kerry and Dublin final, which was held in Limerick. A

Now in its 48th year, the Rose of Tralee Festival is in full bloom! Moving with the times, it is widely recognised as a world-class event and attracts visitors from the four corners of the globe. If anyone were to question its role in Irish society today, they only need look at the calibre of the young women entering the competition and see how they embody all we are proudest of in Ireland. Although not a beauty contest, they are all beautiful.



Tralee, Co. Kerry are the nine Irish finalists for the 2007 Rose of Tralee - (Left to right) Wicklow Rose Lisa Marie Berry, Longford Rose Gráinne Fox, Kerry Aisling Reihill, Dublin Rose Aoife Judge, Limerick Rose Melaine Carroll, Westmeath Rose Marisa Murray, Derry Rose Niamh O'Kane and Cork Rose Mary-Rose. Roses came through individual heats in their own counties to claim a place in the final, while the other six contestants all won through from the regional clothes are from Debenhams in Tralee and all the jewellery is from Newbridge Silverware, chief sponsors of the Rose Of Tralee Festival

but also extremely well educated, poised, talented and articulate - the true epitome of modern Irish womanhood. That is certainly worth recognising and celebrating. This year, 30 Roses from around Ireland went to the regional finals, held in Limerick, with six girls getting through. Dublin, Cork and Kerry held their own finals and these girls will join their Irish and international counterparts for the Grand Final in Tralee this August.

VIP gathered together the nine Irish

Roses for this shoot in the new home of the Festival, the stunning Fels Point Hotel. Stylists, hairdressers, make-up artists and chief sponsor Newbridge Silverware were on hand to prepare the girls for their moment in the spotlight and, contrary to what one might expect, there was not a tantrum or tiara in sight!

Cork Rose Mary Rose Howell (24)

Despite hating odd numbers, the fact that she was the seventh girl on stage

in the Cork heats and the date was 7/7/2007 proved lucky for Mary Rose. On a career break as a Youth Respite Worker with Muscular Dystrophy Ireland, she has just returned from a round the world trip with boyfriend of 11 years, Dave O'Driscoll. Her father was diagnosed with the illness when she was a small child, and lobbying to raise awareness on disability is a subject very close to her heart. Being from Cork, and the fact that her parents have fostered close on 70 children since she

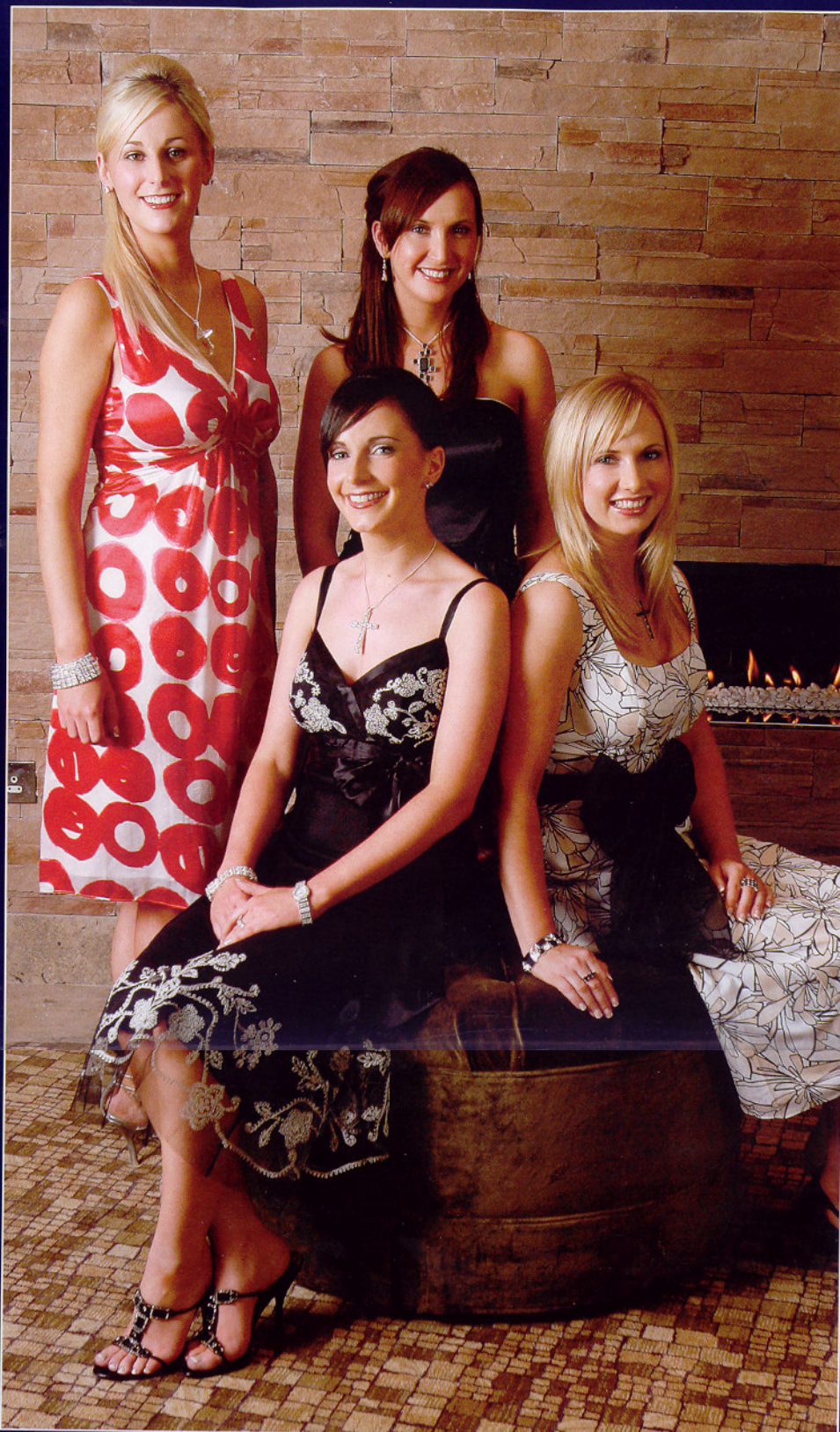
was a child, means that there will be no shortage of supporters for Mary Rose at the Festival!

Mary, did you always dream of becoming a Rose?

Always! When I was younger if someone asked me what I wanted to be, I said 'the Rose of Tralee'. With my name being Mary Rose, I thought it was meant to be.

What qualities make you a good Rose?

Firstly, to be a good role for younger



(Pictured above) Wicklow Rose Lisa Marie Berry, Derry Rose Niamh O'Kane, Longford Rose Gráinne Fox and Westmeath Rose Marisa Murray. Niamh has shown particular courage in entering this year's competition, as she has always suffered from a very bad stammer, which has only been improved by treatment in the past year and a half. When asked about her motivation for entering the pageant, Niamh told us "I really think it's exorcising my ghosts. The programme is all about getting out of your comfort zone and I think this is probably the number one way of doing that." (Far right) Fermanagh Rose Aisling Reihill, Limerick Rose Melanie Carroll and Cork Rose Mary-Rose Howell turn on the style!

people because they look up to you. Then to be a good ambassador for Cork, it's a fantastic county and I'm so proud to be from there and I want to do it proud.

You're with your boyfriend 11 years - when's he going to pop the question?

I've caught the bouquet at the last two weddings we've been to! My best friend is getting married on Friday, I'm hoping to make it three in a row, so you never know!

What would it be like if you won?

Being selected as the Cork Rose was it for me. If I never got to Tralee it would be OK because I feel like a winner already. I can't imagine it; I'll have to let this sink in first.

Derry Rose Niamh O'Kane (22)

The prospect of performing on stage would leave some in a panic, so it isn't hard to imagine the courage it takes for someone who has overcome a stammer. Niamh, from Maghera, developed a stammer as a child and despite different treatments, it was not until she attended the McGuire Programme a year and a half ago that she noticed an improvement. She is now studying to become a Primary Coach on the programme, has just finished her teaching degree and is a part-time carer with the elderly. For a girl who once attended an interview and could not get a word out, being a Rose is a dream come true...

Niamh, are you concerned that being in such a stressful situation might cause your stammer to return?

I really think it's exorcising my ghosts. The Programme is all about getting out of your comfort zone and I think this is probably the number one way of doing that.

Are you nervous about performing?

I'm more so now since looking back over my performance in Limerick. I realised I'm not as good a singer as I thought. I thought I was in tune!

Roses are often synonymous with the caring professions. Why did you become a carer?

I did it for a summer four years ago; I loved it so much I kept it on. It's so important, it's made me be a better person. It makes you more thankful and appreciate what you've got.

Are you looking forward to meeting your escort?

Yes, you never know what might happen there! My friends are too; they're single and looking for introductions!

Dublin Rose Aoife Judge (21)

Glasnevin girl Aoife has just finished a BA in History and Politics, and wants to pursue a career in television presenting. This may sound like a pipe dream, but not for Aoife, who has experience presenting on Campus Television Network, and saw off 49 other contestants for the Dublin Rose. Aoife has confidence that belies her young years, but before anyone thinks this is purely for selfish reasons, she is doing it for her Granny who passed away in 2002 and whom she knows is looking down and smiling.

How are you enjoying the shoot today?

It's absolutely fantastic, it's things like this that make it feel more real.

What makes a good Rose?

I think she has to be unique. She has to be ladylike, to smile readily, ▶





Out and about in Tralee are (l-r) Limerick Rose Melanie Carroll, Longford Rose Gráinne Fox and Dublin Rose Aoife Judge. Gráinne is an accomplished musician, and has performed in public many times, so we asked her if this would be an advantage on the night of the Grand Final. "I don't think so," she told us, "because every single girl in this competition has so much to offer. I wouldn't like to be a judge. Saying that, I'm used to lots of people watching me, so I don't get as nervous. It definitely helped for the Regionals..."

to be friendly and polite, to be generous with her time and have an infectious personality. People compare this festival to Miss Ireland, but Miss Ireland is looking for one quality, which is physical beauty. Here you are looking for the rounded woman, what she stands for, believes in and values and that's why it's a unique competition.

What do you say to the people who criticise the Festival?

These girls are so talented. It's a nice

way to show off our young women for who they really are, not just dollies.

Are you looking forward to it?

Absolutely, having been in the hotel and seen how beautiful it is, the next time I'm here it'll be in full swing, I can't wait.

Fermanagh Rose Aisling Reihill (20)

Aisling's story really is a tale of tracksuits to tiaras! A former U16 inter-county medal winner and Player of the Year, Aisling is the first girl from Fermanagh

ever to get to the Rose of Tralee. From Donagh, Aisling is studying Physiotherapy in the University of Ulster in Jordanstown and will be bringing a huge contingent to Tralee - even her poor neglected boyfriend!

You train the underage girls football team, are they excited for you?

Ever since I've won, they've been making me little cards; they think I'm a princess just because I have a tiara!

Would you encourage younger girls to become a Rose?

Saying how good it is, I definitely would. It is such a good experience, we are being treated like royalty and all the girls are lovely.

Will you perform your football skills as your party piece?

I could have a game with Ray and teach him to solo, but I don't think that would go with the heels! It would be funny, but I'm playing it safe with a poem.

GAA is very much part of Irish culture, do you think the Rose of



Tralee is too?

Definitely - it's also getting so broad and international, the way Ireland is. We've all been watching it since we were children and I think there is a part of every girl that would love to be a Rose.

Kerry Rose Laura Costelloe (22)

The day of the Kerry Rose selection will live long in Laura's memory. She finished her finals in Law and European Studies at the University of Limerick, jumped in the car and was crowned the Kerry Rose that night! She has since got her results, first class honours and is hoping that the good luck will continue, but she has her Rose shoes firmly planted on the ground! With the spotlight on the home girl, her dress, designed by

local designer Karen Doyle, is a closely guarded secret.

Laura, is there added pressure being the home Rose?

It's more support than pressure. Because I'm from Tralee, the whole town is behind me, they are genuinely delighted and feel like winners already. They are more delighted for me than expecting me to win and, as I've been reminded, a Kerry Rose has never won!

Will all that support make it easier for you on the night?

It will be a bit nerve wracking, as you are more in the spotlight as the home girl. I'm so conscious of representing my town. I grew up with this Festival, I love it and I still can't believe that I'm in it. I hope that I won't do anything that will reflect badly on my town, my

county or me, so I'm a bit nervous. I always wanted to be a Rose, so it's a dream come true.

How does it feel to be filling the shoes that you always looked up to?

Every time I see the sash I think, 'oh my God I'm the Kerry Rose!'

Limerick Rose Melanie Carroll (22)

Limerick lass Melanie embodies all that is good in the modern Irish woman - intelligent, mannerly, focused and beautiful. Here is a girl who knows where she is going in life. She is presently doing her Masters in European and Comparative Law in the University of Limerick and hopes to become a solicitor. Proudly supported by her family and boyfriend, Mark Kiely, if Limerick were looking for an ambassador to champion its cause, it

need look no further than Melanie.

Are Roses and solicitors not at opposite ends of the spectrum?

A Rose has to be a people person, as does a solicitor, so I think the two roles can cross over.

How important is it for you to present Limerick in a good light?

Extremely important. My roots go really deep in Limerick; it has a piece of my heart. I think a lot of the media attention is unwarranted, but all I can say is that the Limerick I know is not like that. It has had so much bad press that it's almost forgotten how good it is, but I really feel that is changing, as time will show.

Is there pressure on you to do your best?

Yes, but it's good pressure. You want to do yourself, your family and your

county proud and that makes up the younger generation. At various stages she has played guitar, recorder, violin, flute, harp and banjo, choosing now to focus on the piano and has participated in Seór na n'Og many times. Would winning the Rose of Tralee be another string to her bow?

Did you always want to be a Rose?

I always admired them; they represent something that is great. They are independent women who have a goal in life, they have direction and focus, I think any parent would want their daughter to embody that.

Longford Rose Gráinne Fox (23)

Sponsored by the Spiral Tree in Longford, Gráinne is thrilled to be representing Longford at the Festival. She has recently finished her H Dip in Music Teaching and can't wait to

impart her passion for music to the younger generation. At various stages she has played guitar, recorder, violin, flute, harp and banjo, choosing now to focus on the piano and has participated in Seór na n'Og many times. Would winning the Rose of Tralee be another string to her bow?

Do you think being used to the stage gives you the upper hand?

I don't think so, because every single girl in this competition has so much to offer. I wouldn't like to be a judge. Saying that I'm used to lots of people watching me, so I don't get as nervous. It definitely helped for the Regionals, so



(Top left) The nine Irish Roses relax in the Fels Point Hotel in Tralee while (above) Westmeath Rose Marisa Murray and Cork Rose Mary-Rose Howell are pictured in the grounds of the hotel



On a rare sunny moment this summer, Wicklow Rose Lisa Marie Berry and Kerry Rose Laura Costelloe are pictured together! As the 'home' Rose, we asked Laura if she felt there was more pressure on her than the other girls - "It's more support than pressure," she told us. "Because I'm from Tralee, the whole town is behind me, they are genuinely delighted and feel like winners already. They are more delighted for me than expecting me to win and as I've been reminded, a Kerry Rose has never won!"

hopefully...

Are you very confident in yourself?

In some areas I would be. I'm a teacher so I'm used to standing up in front of people. However, when it comes to singing and playing the piano, I will be nervous...

What will you perform?

Maybe the song that was the first one played at my parents wedding. They are 25 years married the week of the Festival, but I think that Daddy might get embarrassed.

Is he proud of his daughter?

He is, but he's quieter about it. Mammy is so excited running around telling everyone.

You said you wouldn't like to be a judge, why do you think you were picked?

I honest to God don't know. From what I saw at the Regionals they could have put all the girls through, maybe I was just picked out of a hat!

Westmeath Rose Marisa Murray (25)

At 25, Marisa is the elder lemon of the group, and admits that now is the right time for her to enter the competition. A Sales Executive for Nestlé, she has the healthy realism that it's not about winning, but the fact that she tried. She sailed through the Regional Finals in Limerick, perhaps due to the fact that driving around the country for a living, listening to Ray D'Arcy on Today FM, made her feel like she knew him and put her at her ease. At the time of this shoot, Marisa had a hairline fracture to her foot, with her leg in a cast, putting her party piece for the show in doubt...

Please tell us you weren't going to do a dance?

I was, but maybe now it's a good thing!

Sales people are known for their gift of the gab - has your job helped with this?

It has helped me to be more confident, but it's something that I love. I love being surrounded by people and think it comes naturally.

Do you have to have loads of confidence to get up on stage?

I think so, it's hard and I will have nerves, but it's a once in a lifetime chance to showcase what you're like as a person. I will try and forget about the audience and imagine it's just a chat with Ray.

Do you think the notion of the Rose is dated?

It has become more modern. It still represents young women, their dreams and aspirations.

What are you looking for in your escort?

I'm not too fussy, someone I can get on with and have a laugh. Personality is much more important than looks. With the dodgy leg, I'm looking for a big strong man!

Wicklow Rose Lisa Marie Berry (20)

20-year-old Lisa has experience befitting someone twice, even three times her age. She's a professional Irish dancer having performed and travelled with Riverdance, Noel V Ginnity's Traditional Irish Cabaret Show and Dervish. She is studying for a BA in UCD, hoping to become a secondary school teacher and is the first Wicklow Rose to get to the Festival. Firsts are not new to Lisa - from a disadvantaged area in Bray, she is the first member of her family to attend college and is an inspiration to her family. With extra pressure on her to perform her party piece, with the help of her dance teacher Olive Hurley, she set to be wow!