

It's official: Ginger

AFTER years of being told blonde is beautiful and bronzed is best, the fashion world has decided porcelain pale, flame-haired model, Lily Cole, is the depiction of modern beauty.

Now redheads across the country are celebrating: after years of teasing in the school playground and rejection at the disco, their Celtic colouring is finally cool. **GEORGINA HEFFERNAN** talks to six redheads about learning to love their 'carrot tops'.

Spin FM radio presenter **Sarah Solan, 26**, who lives in Dublin, says:

NOT only do I have red hair, but it is curly too, so you could say that I took a lot of stick as a child. I was called all the usual names: 'kipper', 'carrot top', 'curly Sue' and boys would find it really hysterical to pull my hair and shout out: 'Ding a ling a ling — your hair's on fire!'

The teasing was all the worse because of my bad skin. Spots, red hair and the curls — it seemed an impossibly cruel combination.

By the time I hit 16, I'd had enough. I decided to dye my hair. The girls in the salon where I

worked on reception told me I was wasting my time, that red hair didn't take dye because it was so dense. But I wasn't going to listen. I set about putting in blonde highlights.

After hours of messing, I was devastated to see they made very little difference. It was as if no matter how hard I tried, I was destined to be a redhead. So over the years I've accepted my lot — and I've even grown to love it. My boyfriend says my red hair was the first thing that attracted him to me.

We worked together in TV3 for a few years and he told me he always noticed me when I walked into a room because my curly red hair made me stand out from the blondes and brunettes. He told me my red hair reflected my bubbly personality and he found that very attractive. He calls me his 'little firecracker!'

Do I find redhead guys attractive? Well, if I was straight up and honest, I'd say 'No'. I think it's more unfortunate to be a male redhead than a girl. At least we have hair and make-up to play with. I hope to God that if I have a baby boy one day, he's not going to be a redhead.

MUIREANN BIRD, 18, from *Co Meath*, an actress who starred in the RTE soap *Rough Diamond*, has been tipped for Hollywood. She says:

I'VE been told a few times, 'God, you're not bad looking for a redhead.' Of course, the implication there is that because you have red hair it's a freak of nature if you are in any way attractive.

Redheads are about the only group it's still acceptable to take the mickey out of. You can't tease people about their height or weight anymore, but for some reason we're still fair game. I have no idea why. Perhaps it's because we are strong people and we can take it. It's very unfair.

THAT said, I've been very lucky in my career so far and I think that my appearance has helped. I stand out because there's less redheads floating around than there are blondes or brunettes, and I'll always be cast as 'The Irish Girl'.

When I was younger, my pale skin was more of an issue than my hair colour. But I've embraced my whiteness and now I wear mini-skirts and shorts with my whiter than white legs on display — it doesn't bother me at all. As for clothes, I'm careful with the colours that I wear. I don't wear orange or yellow because they look dreadful on me.

Nicole Kidman and Lindsay Lohan used to look amazing when they had red hair but they have both started to go blonder and blonder. Now they just look like everyone else.

CERRI MCQUILLAN, 20, is a model from Dublin, who has appeared in *Vogue*. Cerri is a natural blonde but has recently dyed her hair red. She says:

WHEN I came back from Hong Kong at the beginning of this year, I walked into my modelling agency, Morgan, and I was amazed at the amount of blonde girls on the books.

For years, being a natural blonde worked for me. But now that every second girl on the street is bleach blonde and fake-tanned, I decided I wanted to look different.

In Paris, I was the small pale-skinned girl with blazing red hair, in among incredible California blondes and dark-haired Brazilian babes — but I still got the job. I have noticed that fashion companies are moving away from that all-American look and now they are going for an edgier, cooler image.

I think that red hair works better in pictures because it makes more of an impact and you definitely stand out. You can go a bit crazy with it and look a bit cooler.

Redheads can also wear a bigger variety of clothes than blondes. The red hair warms your face quite a lot

They were nicknamed 'carrot top' at school and ignored at the disco but thanks to Lily Cole and Nicole Kidman, these Celtic beauties are finally red hot...

so you can wear blacks and greys without your face looking too washed out. When I was blonde, I had to put up with the whole 'Barbie Girl' image. Now I'm taken a bit more seriously and I don't get that sleazy reaction from guys any more.

LOUISE DALY, 23, is a primary schoolteacher, from Drumcondra, Co Dublin, who models part-time with *Take One*. She says:

I WAS in New York last November and was given a police escort across the road because, I was told, not only was I Irish, I was a redhead too. Everywhere I went I felt as if I was Angelina Jolie or someone really famous — everyone was stopping and asking me about my hair. It's amazing — once you get out of Ireland, people treat you like a statue to be adored.

Going to an inner city Dublin school, I was a target for bullies because of my bright red hair. I was the only redhead in a class full of girls and suffered a torrent of taunts and snide comments every day. It was the late Nineties, and Britney Spears had just broken onto the pop scene. Blonde was beautiful.

But in the last few years there has been a lot more famous redheads making it big in Hollywood. Suddenly being a redhead is trendy. I always get

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