



New image: Bardot at 55, presenter of *SOS Animaux*, her conservation programme

erie of more than 100 animals she keeps at the two houses.

There are about 40 wild or wildish cats in St-Tropez (some descended from Colette's pets of more than 50 years ago), a cacophony of barking dogs (mostly of uncertain ancestry, to say the least), a mare, a donkey and some goats. "When I hear of an animal in trouble I try to take it in," she says. "I have a lot of animals." The well-tended animal cemetery at the back of her house remembers past pets. Sometimes her charity backfires as in the case of Charly, her neighbour's donkey which she agreed to keep this summer while his owner was on holiday.

It is rather a relief to hear of a creature that proved too much for Bardot: "I had no idea that he would turn out such an expensive and stubborn animal," she says. The trouble began when Charly, ignoring the charms of the

on the property to separate the beasts, and she could not contain Charly's owner. So, on advice from local vet, she had the ardent bea castrated under anaesthetic. Charly seemed not to mind too much, but his owner was enraged and the story was the subject of great ribaldry in St-Tropez this summer. Bardot is appalled by the way the incident was reported.

From the outset, Brigitte was more a personality than a performer. If now she claims to play her real self, in 1955 she was not doing much else. Indeed, as Vadim saw, that was her secret. "She was the first actress to play herself. . . . It's generally believed that I invented Brigitte. But it is precisely because Brigitte was not the product of anyone's imagination that not her parents nor society nor her profession affected her deepest nature, and that she was able to shock, seduce, create a new style and explode in the world as a symbol."

The story of the *ingénue* who emerged from the bourgeois shadow of post-war Paris to symbolise the sexual mores of an age has been told and retold. It began with a teenage romance with a dark stranger (Vadim) and led to a mixed catalogue of 48 films; three marriages, one child, suicide attempts and a constant attendant rout of publicity. Men fantasised, women copied: the look is still not dead.

Why little Mlle Bardot and not another is an unanswerable question. In America it was Monroe; in Europe it happened to be Bardot, a baby of the Occupation. BB is usually analysed in terms of her prime and her navel, but the immediate past history of her country and her family background may be more relevant. Born in 1934, Bardot was only six when France fell, and ten at the Liberation. The trauma of being invaded and occupied probably meant more, consciously, to her future husband Roger Vadim than to Bardot, who lived a protected and affluent life as the daughter of an industrialist. But the

legacy was there. She led a strict and structured life, one in which she and her sister were unforgettably punished for some misdemeanour, aged nine and five respectively, by being forbidden to call their parents "tu" ever again. "I felt as if I had lost my parents," Bardot said years later.

In spite of them, she matured into a world where freedom was exploding, existentialists were in the cafés, and all, for a moment, seemed right with the world. At 15, in 1949, she was on the cover of *Elle*, and caught Vadim's eye and through him, fellow director Marc Allégret's. Her career, albeit uncertainly, began.

"I won't have any gypsies in my family,"

daring grew, threats and protests came from family organisations and the OAS. Young people loved her.

As Glenys Roberts wrote in her 1984 biography of Bardot, the young "had had enough of watching the older generation make a mess of things all over the world and those in occupied Paris had good reason to feel particularly vulnerable. All over Europe, students left the universities because they felt old before their time; they wanted to get on with real, not theoretical, life. They had seen the fighting, now they wanted to experience something good before it was too late."

The scandalous impact Bardot had is now hard to imagine — the fracas over the sensual but rather innocent nudity and love scenes with Jean-Louis Trintignant in *And God Created Woman*, the national row over a poster showing her in a bikini, could belong to another world.

But she caught the spirit of the time in more than a sexual way: she threw off solid bourgeois values like a corset she certainly didn't need. Her lack of interest in material luxury, her casual dress, her wild hair. She was unstuffy, un-nobbish and unimpressed by the great. She was *natural* in a world which had had for the moment its fill of uniforms and formal dress. She turned down invitations from Churchill, Onassis and Hollywood. Most of her lovers were bohemians like herself. Even when married to millionaire Gunther Sachs, she continued to play the gypsy.

The flaw was, of course, that such freedom is an illusion and that personally, although much doted on and indulged, she hadn't much faith in herself. She always refused the big tests — she wouldn't go to Hollywood, turned down work with some of the heavier directors, handed over her son to his father, Jacques Charrier, to be raised.

She could not establish a lasting relationship with a man; she became bored, alternating between a longing for a life of simple domestic tranquillity and the hungry search for a love that would last and a liberty that would give her wings.

This contradictory dream — lived out in her life and promoted in her films — was an exaggerated version of the dilemma of the other women of her generation, caught on the cusp between liberation and the Old Values. How could the two be reconciled? At her superstar level, Bardot whirled ever faster in a dance of self-gratification and insecurity. She seems to have been physically warm and generous but emotionally underdeveloped. She came to mistrust men generally. She has been quoted as referring to past lovers as no more memorable than a pencil one used ten years ago.

Glenys Roberts sees this behaviour as almost a form of fame addiction, a dependence on excitement, which in the end leads only towards death — an end which Brigitte Bardot nearly reached prematurely more than once.

Countering the self-destructiveness, however, was always an instinct for

is both hunter and prey'



father Jacques Charrier, millionaire Gunther Sachs

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