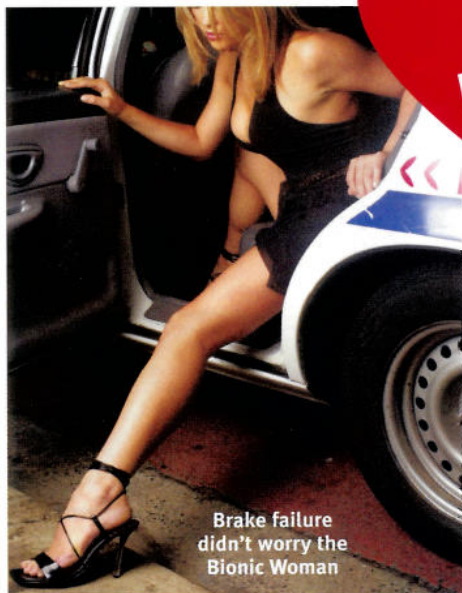


not a good idea to talk about other dates, or the dating site itself, but it's all you have in common. She complains that people misrepresent themselves. One bloke who turned up on her doorstep was clearly a different person from the one in his photo. He said they might as well go out anyway, now he was here. She slammed the door in his face.

I give her a neutral version of my first date (minus head job and shouting). She seems envious I didn't have a terrible time. "I've had a few dates, and there was something wrong with all of them. One even tried to tell me what to wear before we met. Others just wanted to talk about themselves all the time."

Anxious not to make any of the seemingly endless mistakes, I offer to buy dinner at the restaurant upstairs. It's only when we get up there that I realise how classy the place is. I try to make out like I eat in places like this a lot, but break out in a cold sweat when the menu arrives. I'll be in debt for years if she even orders a starter. We have a main course each and a bottle of wine. She chips in \$40 to the total and we head back to the bar.

An hour later, when we run out of things to bullshit about, we zero in for a kiss. Again, disbelief: I'm pushing a Swedish nurse I met on the Internet.



Brake failure didn't worry the Bionic Woman

In the taxi to her place my conscience kicks in. I haven't exactly lied to her, but I have told a pocket-sized version of the truth. Despite all the pushing and fumbling, I resolve to be a gentleman. If I can remember what that is.

She makes it difficult by doing interesting manoeuvres in my mouth with her tongue, and saying things in Swedish. But when the taxi stops, I boot her out before my willpower goes. By the time I remove my profile from the site a month later, having received a couple more messages and a few smiles, I am over it.

And old news. I talk to women on e-mail and the phone. Most of the time, it's quickly obvious that we could have a good date, but only if we never spoke to each other. I get fed up with conversations where I feel like my personality's on trial. It's worse than a job interview. I arrange one more date, but the girl cancels. She doesn't phone. I don't phone.



"You are looking deep into my... Oi!"

ANITA



FOR: You meet lots of people without having to break the ice

AGAINST: You have to make non-stop small talk for over an hour

WHY WOULD YOU?: At the first real date, you already like each other

I DECIDED I would hate Fast Date (www.fastdate.com.au) even before I went, just to save time. I hated it because it's being pushed harder than a broken-down van in heavy traffic, and because it's been on TV.

Unfortunately, it's a great idea. I realise this when I turn up at the bar and dislike three girls on sight. There are 12 blokes and 12 girls crammed into a tiny room, all of us with numbers pinned to us. Different numbers, obviously. After six minutes talking to a girl, a bell rings and the blokes move on for a turn with someone else.

The brilliant thing is, people know very quickly whether or not they like someone. If you're out on a proper date, you then spend hours confirming it. With fast dating, I know – especially with the girls I dislike on sight – that after the six minutes are up, I need never talk to them again. The girls all say they're there "just for a bit of a laugh". They also say the guys are pretty serious about it.

The organiser gives each person a card on which we put our names, badge numbers and e-mail addresses. If you like someone, you write their number on the card. If she's also put you down, you get sent each other's mobile numbers. Then you can have a proper date.

Twelve girls times six minutes is a long time to talk, however. After potting my life story into three minutes a few times, I'm boring myself. By the end, I'm losing my voice and desperately need a beer. The last girl and I agree to tell each other outrageous lies just to break it up. She's a stripper and I'm a fighter pilot, apparently.

The organiser later sends me an e-mail saying I was the "most requested person there", but I bet he tells everyone that. The only number I put on my card is that of a very cute blonde primary-school teacher. She didn't request me, naturally.

CONCLUSION

I IN A period of six weeks I've had two dates, both OK. I could have had more, but I found out I'm too picky. The whole process is boring and frustrating and sometimes exciting – just like being single. I could probably have done just as well if I'd hung out in pubs for six weeks. And my social life would have been better. I am still single.



Hello. Shall we get straight to it?