



Carol Vorderman made her name as a maths expert, but found it harder to balance the career/family equation. The *Loose Woman* and self-confessed workaholic tells Eugene Costello how she figured it out.

There's nothing diva-ish about Carol

Vorderman, despite having spent 30 years on national TV, written countless books and fronted many successful commercial ventures. Interviewing her is more like chatting to an old friend. She resolutely refuses to take herself seriously and politely shuns any attempt at flattery.

Vorderman laughs off the suggestion that she is a fabulous advert for someone who has turned 50. "Well, 51," she gently corrects, with a reassuring insistence on numerical accuracy. And why not? This woman is smart in every way and she knows it. People often talk of the confidence of youth, but the former *Countdown* presenter has a far more deep-rooted confidence, born of long-standing success and of being comfortable in her own skin.

"That's kind of you to say, but it's all about making small adjustments to be healthy, without being obsessive," she says. "First and foremost, I should point out that I am a workaholic. I put in lots and lots of very long hours, often for days on end, and I always have done. The nine to five doesn't appear in my register at all. When I was in my thirties and had my two children, I put on an awful lot of weight. I was working very hard at the time and I couldn't seem to lose the baby fat."

She warms to her theme: "I found that I was always very tired. My overriding memory, in fact, of my thirties is one of being tired all the time."

As she reflects on her thirty-something self, it's clear that there is no rewriting of history to portray herself as some sort of having-it-all superwoman. "Of course I



Counting on *Carol*

“I will never allow my view of myself to be dictated by the press. I have read so many lies about me”

was tired, with two small children and working all hours. I had a production company and a career in TV. And then I started writing books as well,” she recalls.

Adding up to trouble

Towards the end of her thirties Vorderman felt completely exhausted – “to the point where I thought: ‘I really don’t know if I can do this any more.’” Something had to change, she says, so she started out on a detox diet (“well, my own version of a detox diet, anyway”) that featured fresh fruit and vegetables, brown rice, no wheat, no alcohol and no meat.

“This was only for a month,” she is quick to stress, anxious not to sound as though she’s claiming to be a nutritional expert. “I’m certainly not saying that this is what everyone should do. It was simply what I did. It was really just a kick-start.”

It was all about being healthy, she says. And, while she did lose a lot of weight, she observes that plenty of diets can deliver weight loss. “The amazing thing for me was that it entirely changed my energy levels.” She augmented her diet with supplements – including fish oil – and it made her “utterly convinced that what you put in affects your life”.

From that point onwards, her focus has been on pursuing a more balanced way of life. The effort has paid off. When you reach a certain age, Vorderman explains, a woman’s hormones really do go all over the place. The menopause is a fact of life, but she hasn’t noticed any negative effects from the ageing process and is convinced that this is thanks to sensible eating, a healthy lifestyle and the right supplements.

She seems to have found a happy balance in other areas of her life, too, and has an interesting domestic arrangement.

“Mum has always lived with me, or vice versa. She got divorced at about my age, so she was always around. She lived just

round the corner until we moved to Bristol five years ago and she stays very close. She has been very involved with the kids. My daughter, who is now at Cambridge, sees my mum as just as maternal as I am. This kind of set-up is entirely normal in societies such as India or even Ireland.”

A good friend and her teenage children also live *en famille* – “the Vorderman commune” she laughs – so it’s clear she has a tight-knit support team.

How does she feel about being portrayed as the “thinking man’s crumpet”? She throws her head back and gives a throaty chuckle. “Well, for one thing, I don’t know that I am. And, second, I will never allow my view of myself

to be dictated by what the press says. I have read so many lies about me that I’m beyond caring. If it’s a lie, then I’ll leave it to my lawyer. If it’s an opinion, do I care what these people think?”

This is a fortitude born of having been on national TV for 30 years. The first programme on Channel 4 when it started broadcasting in 1982 was *Countdown*, making Vorderman the second person – after her much-missed friend, the late Richard Whiteley (pictured, above) – to be seen on the network. “The anniversary is 2 November,” she points out, reminding us again of her attention to numeric detail.

She doesn’t seem to bear any ill-will towards those in the media who have wronged her, either. When Piers Morgan was sacked as editor of the *Daily Mirror* after publishing fake photos of military abuses in Iraq, he went public, taking a vicious swipe at Vorderman and her then partner, Des Kelly, the newspaper’s deputy editor. Asked about it, she laughs. “Piers and I and have made up since then.”

So they’re pals? “Oh, no. We were never pals. But we’re not enemies. His rancour was aimed at Des and I caught the tail end of it. But that’s OK. Piers and I are fine; we’ve made up. I mean, he’s

not a big buddy of mine, but he never was. He doesn’t affect my life at all.”

Since leaving *Countdown* in 2008 she has become a stalwart of ITV’s *Loose Women*. “I love live TV, gossiping and being part of a gang,” she says. “What’s not to like?”

Have her famous abilities waned in her time away from the numbers board? As a final conundrum, I throw her the old “how much is a pint of milk?” teaser, usually designed to test if a celebrity is as grounded as they claim to be. “I don’t know,” she says.

Aha – maybe she’s not as switched on and as down to earth as we’ve been led to believe, after all. When told that a pint of milk costs about 55p, she replies: “Really? I don’t buy it in pints. I get it at the Co-op for 87p a litre. Perhaps you should switch.”

Ten points to Vorderman.



THE SECRETS OF OUR COVER GIRL

Carol Vorderman denies being a poster girl for the over-50s, but she was nonetheless voted Rear of the Year in 2011. So just how does she do it?

KEEPING TO A BALANCED DIET

“I mean, I’m not Gwyneth Paltrow on a macrobiotic diet. My idea of a bad week is to have wheat, bread, sandwiches. I’m not on diets to lose weight – although some people seem to think that I should be,” she says, with a dig at the tabloids.

DRINKING ALCOHOL IN MODERATION

“I’m not teetotal; I like a drink, but only on two or three nights a week. It’s all about balance. If I go out of balance, I notice the effect.”

SAILING THROUGH THE MENOPAUSE

“I have had virtually no side-effects. This is down to my diet and my use of supplements.”

Carol Vorderman is a spokeswoman for Bioglan vitamins, minerals and supplements (see the reader giveaway on page 5).