

HOT NUMBERS Girls are picked for sparkling smiles and wit.



Sexing up the game show

Take 26 babes, put them in short dresses and, yes, you've got a 'Deal'

BY BREANNE L. HELDMAN

'Deal or No Deal" may be TV's hottest new game show (most of you have spent at least one night screaming at the screen), but its breakout stars — 26 Halliburton case-carrying models — are even hotter.

No offense, Howie Mandel.

"The girls are a huge element of the show," says Dina Cerchione, the wardrobe stylist responsible for clothing the lovely ladies on the NBC entry. "They're fun, they interact with Howie and the contestants.

It wouldn't be the same if it was just a board up there with numbers being shown. They're pretty to look at, they're sweet, lovely girls and they really do feel for those people on the stage and want them to win the money."

The search for such women — requirements: 5-foot-7 to 5-foot-11, with gleaming smiles and sparkling wit — was extensive. Casting producer David Shumsky picked from more than 1,000 girls (28 were chosen; two are alternates so that the models can accept other gigs).

"It was an exhaustive process," he says. "These girls aren't just window dressing. They have to have the ability to be quick on their feet. Also, we spend so much time together that we also had to find personalities that would be great on the show and would jell with each other."

Case-carrying chicks Tameka Jacobs (No. 21) and Patricia Kara (No. 9) agree that the women, ages 22-34, have done just that.

"When I first started, it seemed like a lot of girls," says Jacobs, 26, who hails from San Jose, Calif. "But it's such a great group of girls. Everyone meshes really well. Even when we're not working, we all hang out."

The women aren't the only highlight

of the job for Jacobs, who also is a spokesmodel for Soul Train. In addition to loving the game, she has an attachment to her case and, of course, her wardrobe.

"The whole suitcase thing kinda makes me feel like a Bond girl," she admits. "I'm hoping to stay 21. It's kind of like your football number. It's almost offensive when people ask you to change. And the dresses rule. They're flattering to everyone's shape and color."

Wardrobe wizard Cerchione shops stores and goes directly to manufacturers to find the frocks. Some of them are made specifically for the show — Maggie Barry and Tadashi have created gowns — and some are purchased directly off the rack, from such designers as Laundry by Shelli Segal, A.B.S. and Maria Bianca Nero.

SHORT AND SWEET

"We like to put short dresses on the girls, because when they're standing there in that pyramid, it's just a prettier look," she says. "It just keeps it fun and light. I think if we did more long gowns, it would maybe get a little too serious."

Bright colors, sparkles and "good clean lines" are the other main ingredients for a "Deal" dress. Prints or light colors that don't work with all the models' skin tones are "no deal."

When the game is in high gear, the models become a part of the excitement, due, in large part, to the fact that they, like the players, have no idea what their Halliburtons contain.

"But you kind of get caught up in it," says Kara. "You think you know what your reaction is going to be, but you get caught up in the contestant's happiness or their losses."

The girls are even closely monitored backstage to ensure that no one takes a peek.

"So we're definitely into the game, and we hate having the million and having to open it," says Jacobs. "We're really, truly sorry."



help me,
b.f.f.!

MODERN ADVICE, NOT ALWAYS NICE

BY SEBASTIAN HART

DEAR BFF: It's been eight months and I told my boyfriend I love him. He told me, "I like you a lot." Am I wasting my time? Should I dump the booger or should I give him some more time to see if his emotions develop? *Loveless in the BX*

DEAR LOVELESS: Aww sweetie, he only "likes you a lot"? That sucks! But I feel like you can't dump every guy who has trouble saying the word "love," because that's about 90% of them.

And just because he can't say it, it doesn't mean he doesn't feel it. For a lot of men, words like "love" are distinctly feminine territory. Boys are supposed to drink beer and watch sports and burp the national anthem with their buddies. Girls get pedicures and wear ribbons and say things like "I love you."

(As a side note, I hate this whole male hip-hop culture thing right now of referring to women as "bitches." How can a guy have a meaningful, respectful relationship with a woman if he's using language like that? And dudes, when she leaves you for disrespecting her, is that going to make you happy?)

But back to you, Loveless: I think eight months is pretty good going. And if there aren't any other major problems in the relationship, I say stick with the booger and through your own love and patience, I'm sure he'll come around.

DEAR BFF: I went out on one date with this girl, but didn't want to take it any further. Now she's telling all our friends I'm a jerk. What do I do?

Bothered in Brooklyn

DEAR BOTHERED: The playwright Ben Jonson said "calumnies are answered best with silence," a fancy way of saying you've got to keep your trap shut and live through it. If you're not into this girl, you did the right thing by not stringing her along. Sadly, sometimes you get criticized no matter what you do.

If you talk to her, it might just make it worse. You don't owe her anything other than honesty — which you seem to have given her — so the best thing to do is nothing at all. Her bad karma is her business, and I'm sure your friends aren't going to change their opinion of you just because you don't want to date a crazy girl.

Got problems? Join the club! See if BFF can help by E-mailing him at BFF@nydailynews.com.



SHE'S GAME Tameka Jacobs, 26, is briefcase No. 21 on "Deal or No Deal."