

'WE HAVE TO LAUGH RIGHT NOW. IT IS ESSENTIAL'

Hollywood's new favourite funny girl AMY SCHUMER has shot to stardom with her unique brand of saucy, self-deprecating humour. She tells *Elaine Lipworth* about her turbulent childhood, finding love and why she cherishes her curves

PHOTOGRAPHS *John Russo*

'I don't see myself as a movie star,' says Amy Schumer, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The most influential comedian in Hollywood right now, Amy vaulted on to the A-list in 2015, when her semi-autobiographical romcom *Trainwreck* (about a commitment-phobic woman called Amy who drinks too much) turned into a global hit. Her brilliantly funny TV sketch show *Inside Amy Schumer* has won three Emmys to date, and she was reportedly paid an \$8 million (£6 million) advance for her bestselling book of personal essays, *The Girl With The Lower Back Tattoo*. Amy's comedy is characterised by graphic routines about sex, relationships and looks – invariably told at her own expense, which apparently doesn't bother her boyfriend of 18 months, furniture designer Ben Hanisch. 'He is very cool about me talking about him on stage,' she says.

Amy, 35, still 'can't believe' she persuaded comedy legend Goldie Hawn to play her mother

in *Snatched*, a film (71-year-old Goldie's first for 15 years) about a trip to South America that goes disastrously awry. 'We get kidnapped, "taken" like Liam Neeson,' Amy says gleefully, referring to the actor's blockbuster franchise. We don't meet her character's father in the film, but when I ask who Amy's first choice for an on-screen dad would be, she says: 'Liam Neeson – he appeared on my show and we got along so well.'

'I don't think there is any funnier actress than Goldie. *Overboard* [Goldie's 1987 film with Kurt Russell] was huge in our house,' says Amy, who brazenly approached the *Private Benjamin* star on a plane when she found herself sitting behind her. 'I was genuinely starstruck and said, "Hi, I'm Amy. I really want you to play my mum in a movie I'm doing."' Goldie didn't recognise the younger actress, but politely said, 'OK honey, sure.'

The two met again at an awards show in London, which Goldie was attending with her daughter, the actress Kate Hudson. 'I think Kate ►



◀ said to her mum, “Amy is really funny.” Goldie and I started plotting together.”

Amy has the kind of friendliness it's impossible to fake. “Sometimes I will leave the house without sunglasses and there'll be paparazzi everywhere. I'll be, like, “Oh, I forgot – I'm famous.” But the people who are close to me – my family and my friends from high school – don't think I am interesting at all.”

In her recent Netflix special, Amy joked, ‘I am what Hollywood calls very fat’, one of her customary self-deprecating put-downs. Yet sitting beside the actress in her Santa Monica hotel suite, I am struck by how slim she is, wearing a sleeveless top over black Rag & Bone trousers. I remark that she looks lovely. ‘I look like a Cabbage Patch doll’ is her deadpan response.

Until recently, Amy was negotiating with the toy company Mattel to star as a distinctly more glamorous doll, Barbie, in an upcoming live-action film (she has since had to drop out due to a scheduling conflict). The news that she was being linked to the role led to a barrage of attacks online from outraged ‘body-shaming’ trolls complaining that she didn't look the part. Needless to say, had she gone ahead with the movie, Amy had no intention of going on a crash-diet to achieve the doll's exaggerated hourglass figure. ‘People now know that with those extreme measurements, Barbie wouldn't have been able to walk,’ she laughs, noting that the dolls have finally been revamped and are now ‘really diverse’.

Does she think the new-look Barbies reflect changing attitudes towards women? ‘Things are moving in the right direction now that we have women in the spotlight like Kim Kardashian and Ashley Graham [the model], who have more voluptuous bodies. I don't think being rail-thin is the epitome of beauty any more,’ she says, admitting that she still deals with insecurities herself. ‘There's the time of the month when I feel good and then there is a week of “I am a monster.” You know, every year you look back at photos of yourself from the year before and you think: “I was so hot last year. Why didn't I appreciate it?” And then it's the same the next year.’ Overall, though, she's happy with her appearance. ‘I love my body now; I feel very womanly. And men, I know, want something to hold on to,’ she laughs.

While making *Snatched* in Hawaii, there was no time for vanity. ‘I wear a bikini and there's some surprise nudity. I'm proud to be on camera like that – it's cool.’ With a script by Katie Dippold (*The Heat* and the *Ghostbusters* remake), the raucous rollercoaster starts when Amy's



Above: Amy with Goldie Hawn at the Golden Globes in January

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Clockwise from top left: Amy with Tom Bateman in *Snatched*; with the cast of *Inside Amy Schumer* at the 2015 Emmys; with her sister Kim, and with Bill Hader in her breakthrough movie *Trainwreck*, which she also wrote

ALL ABOUT AMY

READING? *All The Missing Girls*, a thriller by Megan Miranda.

WHO MAKES YOU LAUGH? My sister and my boyfriend Ben. With some people, the chemistry is so good, you are already laughing when you see them.

WORST JOB YOU EVER HAD? Pedicab driving in Santa Barbara. You drive people around in a rickshaw and I was not in shape for that kind of work. It was hard labour, awful.

WHAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT YOU? I am an introvert. I like being with people one on one or in small groups. I don't like big groups.

PERFECT SUNDAY MORNING? Sleeping in with Ben, waking up, having sex and then getting bagels and fish, that kind of Jewish deli food, having my family come over for a lazy day and maybe going for a walk.

WHAT ARE YOUR DREAMS? Just last night I asked Ben, ‘What are our dreams?’ And he said, ‘I want to go to outer space’ and I was, like, ‘Can that be my dream, too?’ And he was, like, ‘No.’ So I think my dream is to do some kind of [charity] work that would be a clear way of helping people.

character Emily and her boyfriend are about to set off on holiday to Ecuador. ‘He breaks up with me and I ask literally everyone in my phone, friends of friends on Facebook, and no one will go with me, so I take my mum Linda.’

There is a romance in the film, with her love interest played by British actor Tom Bateman. ‘The dream as a single girl on holiday is to meet this gorgeous, smart man who sweeps you off your feet, and that kind of happens.’ But most of the action centres on Amy and Goldie's exploits, as well as slapstick pratfalls. In one scene, Goldie and Amy are squashed in the boot of a car. ‘She is this close,’ says Amy, inching towards me. ‘It's one of those moments between mums and daughters where you say, “Get out of my space!” I think all mums are controlling to a certain extent,’ she adds. ‘They are in control for 18 years and then all of a sudden their kids are going, “Leave me alone” and the mums are, like, “But I have kept you alive all this time!”’

Amy clicked right away with her co-star – and the feeling was mutual. ‘Amy is a genius,’ Goldie tells me, describing the younger actress as ‘beguiling’. Amy also struck up a friendship with Kate Hudson, who visited the film set. ‘I hung out with them both,’ she says. ‘We gossiped and had drinks and you can tell Kate and Goldie have a beautiful relationship.’

Interestingly, while Amy says Goldie was ‘warm and motherly’, she also felt maternal towards her: ‘I made sure Goldie was warm and

had what she needed, because that is how I have always been with my mum.’

In fact, Amy has had a difficult relationship with her own mother; dating back to her childhood, which was turbulent to say the least. She grew up in an affluent New York neighbourhood with Sandra, a teacher for the deaf, father Gordon, who owned a thriving baby-furniture business, younger sister Kim Caramelle (her married name) and elder brother Jason Stein, a musician. When Amy was 12, her father was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and the business went bankrupt.

They moved to Long Island, her parents divorced, and Amy found herself taking care of her

mother; who relied on her for emotional support. ‘When we lost our money and my dad got sick, I became her mum, which was hard.’ To make matters more complicated, ‘my mum started dating’. As the comedian wrote in her book, Sandra had an affair with the father of Amy's best friend.

‘It was all too much for me,’ says Amy, reflecting that when she turned 30, she felt the full impact of that skewed family

dynamic. ‘I realised I'd been under a really unfair amount of pressure. I saw it from the outside and I expressed what I was angry at her for and laid down more boundaries for myself.’ Recently, Amy says, ‘there's been a reinvention’ of the relationship. ‘We still have struggles. But I have made peace with what happened and *Snatched* is a way of saying to her: “I know you did the best that you ▶

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◀ could.” Sometimes you just crave your mother; you need her to hold you.’ She pauses. ‘If I have a nightmare and I am alone at home, I need to hear her voice.’

Back in the 90s, during those chaotic teenage years, Amy also felt a responsibility to take care of her sister Kim, who is nearly four years younger: ‘Because there was so much turmoil in our family, we clung to each other; and I have always viewed her as being like my daughter.’ She stops mid-sentence. ‘Well, she probably views me as her daughter!’ Partners in crime, literally, they used to shoplift together and Amy was arrested (but didn’t go to prison) when she was 21.

A few years ago, Amy persuaded Kim to change careers and work with her: ‘She was a school psychologist and I said, “OK, that’s cool, but now you are going to be a comedy writer!” She is the funniest person I know. A psychic told us we are soulmates,’ says Amy. ‘We love hanging out in pyjamas, watching TV and eating pasta. It is about safety, reverting back to being children before anything went wrong in our family.’

For as long as she can remember, Amy dreamed of performing. ‘I would make everyone gather around and I would tell awful, endless stories about two rabbits.’ She says humour ‘was a defence mechanism I would use to make everyone in my family feel OK’. Many comedians famously survived troubled childhoods; was that a factor in Amy’s success story? ‘I don’t know. I’m not friends with anyone who hasn’t had a really hard life,’ she shrugs, ‘which is a reason why I love living in New York.’ Amy tells me she would never move to La La Land. ‘People here go, “Everything is great” all the time,’ she says in a fake-happy drawl. ‘I’m like, “Ugh, shut up!” In New York if you ask someone how they are doing they say, “Awful.”’

It was in New York that Amy began performing as a stand-up comic after studying theatre in college. She came fourth in the talent show *Last Comic Standing* and, as her reputation grew, there were TV appearances on *30 Rock* and *Girls*. Her show *Inside Amy Schumer* launched in 2013, and quickly gained a strong following. Last year, she performed in several UK cities. ‘I saw beautiful

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Amy speaking at the Women’s March On Washington in January

historical things but the best part was talking to people; mostly I just went to bars.’

Popular with both women and men (‘It’s 50/50,’ she says of her fanbase), there is something about the juxtaposition of Amy’s innocent girl-next-door looks with her explicitly sexual routines that makes her humour so compelling. Her inner circle includes some of Hollywood’s other leading funny women. ‘My famous friends are Jen [Jennifer Lawrence], Lena [Dunham], America [Ferrera], Amber [Tamblyn] and Amy [Poehler].’ She says they are all down to earth. ‘If we were meeting for dinner and somebody was wearing heels, we would be, like, “Are you OK?” We would be passing a note that said, “What is going on?”’

She’s also friendly with a group of high-school pals, ‘teachers and nurses...they have noble jobs. There was a phase when they were waiting to see if I was going to change.’ She didn’t. Amy, who is generous to a fault and often leaves sizeable tips (last year she famously left \$1,000 for a \$77 bar bill), enjoys treating them to holidays. ‘We went to Martha’s Vineyard two years ago, then a year ago it was the Hamptons. We all wear sweatpants, no make-up. I love my girls – they were always badasses and now they are married with kids.’ Does Amy want children herself? ‘I’m not sure, but probably, because I love kids,’ says Amy, who is devoted to her three-year-old niece.

All Amy’s friends get along, she says. Is it intimidating for her old pals, hanging out with Jennifer Lawrence? ‘No,’ she exclaims, sitting bolt upright. ‘They have that New York confidence that borders on arrogance. One day, Jennifer was going

GETTY IMAGES; 20TH CENTURY FOX/PLANET PHOTOS; CAP/FB/CAPITAL PICTURES; ROB LAOURVARIETY/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK; WIREIMAGE

to hang out with us and my friend Jess goes: “Get ready to love me, Jennifer!” That’s the level of confidence they have.’

Amy’s movie *Trainwreck*, directed by Judd Apatow, made more than \$140 million (£110 million) worldwide; Amy is the first woman to appear in *Forbes* magazine’s list of the ten highest-earning comedians, and she admits that it’s thrilling not to struggle any more. ‘I live in a really nice apartment with a doorman, something I never dreamed of.’ But she says the most rewarding aspect of her newfound wealth is splurging on her family.

Her biggest extravagance? Surprising her family by buying back the farm they used to own, before the bankruptcy. Gordon Schumer’s reaction? ‘He won’t stop crying about it, he is so happy.’

Amy seems happy herself, which she will admit is at least in part due to the fact that she’s in love. Amy and her boyfriend Ben, who’s from Chicago, met on a dating app (she won’t say which one). The relationship got off to a good start because Ben wasn’t a fan. ‘He had heard my name, but he had never watched my stand-up, so we could get to know each other and see if we liked each other [without preconceptions].’ Like her friends, Ben isn’t overawed by his girlfriend’s celebrity status, but ‘he’s very protective of me when we go out to dinner and people are taking pictures. He is so cute, but he is also such a goofball; he is really funny.’

Inevitably the media and Amy’s fans take a keen interest in her love life. ‘Last year at the Golden Globes I was so proud of my film [*Trainwreck*] and my TV show, but Ben was there with me and it was just all about the boyfriend. I was, like, “Honestly, having a boyfriend is not my greatest accomplishment – there are other things.”’

Given her track record with men (she’s written about an abusive former relationship and about losing her virginity at 17, which was not consensual), was it sheer luck meeting a man who is kind and respects her; or a deliberate choice to get involved with someone stable? ‘Well, I was scared that I wouldn’t be able to break my pattern,’ says Amy, ‘but at a certain point you say: “I want to be with someone who loves me and makes me feel safe” and Ben is all of that. It doesn’t happen for everyone,’ she continues. ‘We all have friends in bad relationships and we just want to choke their boyfriends.’

Amy’s unique brand of comedy is powerful, smashing stereotypes about women and fighting inequality. She’s a passionate feminist (admired

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Amy with her boyfriend Ben

by women’s rights activist Gloria Steinem for her pioneering comedy, which tackles issues such as the way Hollywood treats older women). ‘I think women are in good hands with me; I feel very protective,’ says Amy. Along with just about every other American comedian, Amy has been vocal in her opposition to Donald Trump and has described him as a ‘racist, homophobic, openly disrespectful woman abuser’.

‘I would rather we were living in a better time,’ she says today. How important is comedy in the current political climate? ‘We have to laugh right now; it is essential.’ Does she have a motto for life? ‘Be kind to yourself – that’s something I try to remember – and be forgiving of yourself.’ And returning to the theme of her latest film, Amy offers a final piece of advice: ‘Love yourself like you are your own mother.’

■ *Snatched will be in cinemas from Friday*