



ASHTON

KUTCHER

Girls love him. Guys want to hang out with him. Find out what you *don't* know about Hollywood's most popular guy! By Lauren Brown

I am talking to Ashton Kutcher. We're having a great conversation—he's making me laugh, starting to open up, and even making fun of me, as if we've known each other for years. I feel like we're bonding so well that I can ask him *anything*. So I take a deep breath and gently turn the conversation to his 41-year-old girlfriend, actress Demi Moore. Suddenly, there's dead silence. He's cautious about every word he says. In that split second, I meet a whole new side of this 25-year-old—the private Ashton, who is extremely protective of his loved ones and therefore guarded when it comes to talking about them. But just change the subject back to things like his upcoming projects, and he'll go off on deep, philosophical tangents.

There are so many layers to Ashton that it's hard to size him up. He's played dim-witted characters like Michael Kelso on *That '70s Show*. He's dated hot actresses like Brittany Murphy and January Jones. He's hung out with P. Diddy and President Bush's

twin daughters, Jenna and Barbara. He even brought Justin Timberlake close to tears on *Punk'd*. Yet he's also been spotted picking up Demi's kids from school, proving that no matter how far he gets from his native Homestead, Iowa, the guy who made trucker hats and "Dude, where's my car?" part of pop culture still sees himself as a small-town boy hardwired with traditional family values. And that's what's so fascinating: One minute he's playing practical jokes, the next he's playing house. True to his unpredictable nature, Ashton switches gears again this month with a serious role in the psychological thriller *The Butterfly Effect* (he gets his first film executive-producing credit too). Actor. Writer. Producer. Ashton Kutcher is nothing less than a triple threat, which is why we're calling him "The Most Talented Guy on the Planet." So if you've been loving him because of his playful pranks, look closer. Here, he reveals a thoughtful side that will turn your love into pure respect. →

PHOTOS: TONY DURAY/CORBIS OUTLINE

HE'S A SMALL-TOWN GUY AT HEART...

"When I first came to Los Angeles from Homestead, Iowa—population: 100—I didn't understand sarcasm. I just thought people were making fun of me. I really wasn't catching it as sarcasm. People in the Midwest don't bust your balls like that, you know? Your friends bust your balls, but a stranger's not going to bust your balls. Here, you don't even have to *know* somebody to bust their balls. Part of my work ethic, my beliefs, and my values are very small-townish. I still wave at people when I drive by them, even if they're strangers, you know, because that's what you do. It's not like a full wave—it's kinda like that steering wheel, finger-nod thing. People think that I'm flippin' them the bird, but I'm just trying to give somebody a 'Have a good day.'"

... BUT HE'S LEARNED TO BE MORE OPEN-MINDED.

"I've come to take in urban culture in a way. I have black friends, I have gay friends. In small-town middle America, that would make me an absolute outcast. Because think about it: You're in small-town Iowa, and you've got this kid who sometimes wears hip-hop clothes and sometimes wears a shirt and a tie. Sometimes he's loud and gregarious and making fun. Sometimes he's meek and scared on the inside, and he really doesn't like who he is. If I was the way I am now when I was in high school, I would have been a complete outcast."

HE'S PHILOSOPHICAL ABOUT THE TRUE MISSION BEHIND PUNK'D.

"There's a trick. There's just one way not to get punk'd: Don't overreact. *Punk'd* is the ultimate lesson in not investing in material things, not investing in crisis, not getting worked up about things, and trying to keep a level head. I would imagine it would be very difficult to punk me. I only get worked up about simple day-to-day things. Like, if I go to the coffee shop and it's not open, I'm like, 'What the f**k?' But say you come home and somebody crashed a gas tanker into your house. If you could be completely selfless and say, 'Is everybody okay? Let's figure this out'—that wouldn't be entertaining to watch on TV. My favorite day will be when I can no longer do the show because everybody is so cool-headed and not out for number one that I can't get them."

THOSE CLOSEST TO HIM WILL NEVER GET PUNK'D!

"I wouldn't punk anyone who is involved in my life on a day-to-day basis, because it's like a trust that I would never want to break. If I already have a relationship with that kind of trust and openness, I would never want to break it in any way. I wouldn't want to create any kind of facade inside of that relationship so as to diminish that trust. There's a fine line."

HE DOESN'T SCARE EASILY.

"The only thing I really fear is failure, and I'm trying to get over that now too. Humiliation is not really a big thing on my fear list. I've been humiliated before, I've been embarrassed before—I'm not afraid of that. The last thing I'm worried about is looking cool. I'm such a spaz anyway, looking cool is not really on my daily worries list. I'm not worried about being fooled or looking like I don't have it all together—because I admit that I don't, and I admit that I'm not cool."

HE WON'T DIRECTLY TALK ABOUT DEMI, BUT YOU CAN TELL HE WANTS IT TO WORK.

"I literally try as hard as I can to be true to myself, and that's all it takes. I think that no matter what, whenever you want something, there's always obstacles. And the more you want something, the more obstacles there are going to be. The challenge is overcoming those obstacles. It's just the universe's way of testing you and asking you, 'How much do you really want this?' If you really want it, you'll make it happen. It's knowing that's what you want and going for it, and working *together* to overcome obstacles."

HIS FRATERNAL TWIN BROTHER, MICHAEL, IS HIS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND SUPPORT.

"He's very supportive of me. He's always there for me when I need him, and I love him. I can only speak from what it might be like if I were in his position, which is something that I haven't experienced. I would assume that it's not always easy, and sometimes I'm sure it can become annoying, and sometimes it can become more of a burden than it seems like it's worth. I think it would bug the hell out of me if every time somebody saw me, the first question they asked was, 'How ya doing?' and the second question they

asked was, 'How's your brother doing?' When people ask me that question about my brother, I love it. I love talking about him, and I love thinking about him. We've got to carry each other around through the world—and that's a good thing."

HE CELEBRATES INDIVIDUALITY.

"I find that the older I get, the more individuality becomes rewarded. I think that somebody who already has that figured out in high school has a head start. You've already overcome a great obstacle, because you are an individual whether people are rewarding you or putting you down for it. They're probably putting you down because they want

what you have. I think you should find confidence in that. It's not about who likes or doesn't like you—it's about whether or not you like yourself. And if you don't like yourself, figure out why and change it."

HE'S A BIT OF A CONTROL FREAK.

"I definitely have control issues. I like to be in the know. I like to have input, and I like to give output. The truth is, I don't have control of anything—I just like to *think* I do. If something is going to have my name on it, be part of my legacy, and be associated with me, I want it to be the best that it can be."

HE KNOWS WHAT IT TAKES TO FIND YOUR SOUL MATE.

"The key is to find what you want in a partner and go after it. It's not about pleasing. I think when you find the right thing, in many ways, what you want out of them will be what they want to give you. Just figure out what you want, and then that person will arrive. Look inside and go, 'What do I need from a partner in life? I want somebody who makes me laugh, I want somebody who takes care of me when I'm sick....' In real life, figure out what it is that you want to give to somebody else—and then find that person." **Q**

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