

mary-kate and ashley

The Olsen twins want you to know that they're just real girls doing real things. But how many "real girls" do you know whose after-school job raked in \$1 billion last year? By Lauren Brown

When you think of Mary-Kate and Ashley, the words *wholesome* and *young* may come to mind. But these sisters, who have pretty much spent their entire lives in the public eye, have definitely grown up. At 16, they run Dualstar Entertainment Group, a lucrative *empire* that, in 2002, made nearly \$1 billion selling the mary-kateandashley brand. Through their home videos, cosmetics, and toys, and bedding and clothing line (sold exclusively at Wal-Mart), they're influencing girls everywhere, not as the "cute little Olsen twins" but as trendsetters and savvy businesswomen. And it's that influence that has even grabbed the attention of Hollywood: Drew Barrymore called them personally to ask them to appear in *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, out this summer. The fact is, Mary-Kate and Ashley are just starting to hit their stride. These two girls have reached the point where they're ready to take control of their business—and their lives.

two of a kind?

Mary-Kate and Ashley made their acting debut at nine months old, sharing the role of Michelle Tanner on the hit television series *Full House* from 1987 to 1995. They got the role by accident: Their mom happened to mention to a friend's agent that she had baby daughters, and the agent asked for their picture. They landed the part. Since then, they've starred in two television series (*Two of a Kind* in 1998 and *So Little Time* in 2001) and in more than 30 home videos.

But despite the identical-twin roles they keep playing, Mary-Kate and Ashley are actually *fraternal* twins. And there are clear differences between them. Mary-Kate is the sporty one; Ashley is more girly. Mary-Kate rides her own horse; Ashley takes yoga and Pilates. Mary-Kate is laid-back; Ashley is more high-strung. "She has to make sure everything is perfect!" Mary-Kate teases. "Like, today in class—our friends even noticed this—she had to talk to the teacher about a test that's coming up, and she was so *businesslike!* She was like, 'Okay, so this is what we have to study? It will only be on page 201? It will only be 10 questions?' It was really very funny." But Mary-Kate will readily own up to what Ashley would say about *her*. "She'd probably say I don't take anything seriously or that I don't concentrate sometimes when I should." As Ashley explains: "Mary-Kate kind of just leaves certain things for me to handle. But if it's something that she really cares about, then she'll speak up and give her opinion."

working girls

These days, giving their opinion is something both girls are doing more often. The day-to-day operations of Dualstar

are still handled by CEO Robert Thorne, an attorney who started working as the girls' contract negotiator for *Full House* when they were just 4 years old. He went on to serve as their agent and manager before setting up Dualstar with the Olsen family in 1993. Since then, it's been Robert who has been involved in practically everything from scheduling them and promoting them (booking flights all over the world for movie shoots, fashion shows, and product launches) to literally speaking for them. But right before his eyes, it seems the girls are taking hold of their independence—and needing his guidance less and less. "There was a casting session with one of the movies we're producing, and one of our partners was trying to influence them in a casting decision based on how much it was going to cost," Robert says. "But Mary-Kate and Ashley called him on it and said, 'This is a creative decision, and we have creative control, and this is who we are going to hire.' I was like, *Whoa*. They grew up in that meeting!"

the power of no

Even though their voices still *sound* young, Mary-Kate and Ashley speak with conviction and authority about their business. "If we feel strongly enough to say no to something, then that's what happens," says Mary-Kate. "It's our line, it's our names and our brand—it's coming from us, Mary-Kate and Ashley. I've learned that 'No' is a full sentence."

And they're putting that sentence to good use. "We have a lot of different categories in Wal-Mart, and there have been a lot of offers for things like cereal, and even mary-kateandashley fruit snacks," explains Ashley. "But that's not necessarily something that we want to do, so we definitely just say no." The ability to make their own decisions for the good of their brand is a skill they've been learning gradually over the past few years. "You know, I'm at a stage where I feel like the older I get, the more I know," says Mary-Kate. "It's easier for me to make decisions that will hopefully benefit me in the future. I feel like the answers I have to questions or things that I decide to do are more accurate now than when I was 12." And that's why they get involved in every step of the process. When the twins decided to do a fragrance line (mary-kateandashley one and mary-kateandashley two) and a plus-size clothing line that Wal-Mart will launch this month, they tested scents (and chose jasmine spice and water lily rose), approved fashion designs, and appeared at trade events and fashion shows. "Our brand is all about being yourself and doing what you love to do," explains Ashley. "There's nothing in our brand that we wouldn't want to represent or have ourselves represent." →

PHOTO: PEGGY SIROTA/CORBIS

real girls

It's hard to picture Mary-Kate and Ashley *outside* of their business because they've always been so careful about keeping their private lives out of the news. They live in the San Fernando Valley, a suburb of Los Angeles, and split their time between their dad, Dave, a mortgage banker and real estate developer, and their mom, Jarnette (their parents divorced in 1996). They have an older brother, Trent, 19, a younger sister, Lizzie, 14, and two half-siblings, Taylor, 6, and Jake, 5, through their dad's second marriage to their stepmom, McKenzie. Even though you'd expect famous teens to lead glitzy lives, Mary-Kate and Ashley aren't exempt from living under house rules. "We never come home late—we're not part of the going-clubbing thing," says Ashley. "We just kind of go to the movies with our friends and all that stuff." At their private school in Los Angeles, they have classes with the kids of famous producers, directors, and actors, so their stardom just isn't that big a deal. "At the school we go to, some of the parents are pretty well-off, so it's kind of like we can all laugh at each other," says Mary-Kate. "I'm glad that everyone's laughing instead of taking themselves too seriously, because it's not a serious thing." And when she's at home, Mary-Kate says, "I'm on the phone, playing with my dog, biting my fingernails—just like a real girl."

almost famous

If anything, these girls get starstruck just as much as anyone else. Even though they were among the lucky A-list stars invited to *Vanity Fair's* exclusive Oscar party in 2002, they were too shy to approach Cameron Diaz and Gwyneth Paltrow, two celebrities the twins totally adore. And like any other girls their age, they've spent many a Friday night doing drive-bys of a cute guy's house—except in their case, he happens to be a star. "My friend found out where a famous person lived," Ashley says. "She really likes this person, and she was really excited, so I said, 'Okay, I'll be the driver.' Five of us got into my car, and we were like, 'Okay, let's drive by the house.' We seriously drove by like 10 times stalking—okay, not *stalking* but just looking at the house!"

But divas they are not. Their dad handles the financial

side of things for them, and they claim they don't really know how much they're worth (reportedly \$150 million each). "That's not interesting to us," says Mary-Kate. "Because we would never be like, 'Oh yeah, we're worth such-and-such.' If we don't care, no one else should." In fact, it seems they've only recently started to truly comprehend what their names have actually built. "You know, it's weird," says Mary-Kate. "The other day, we were doing this fashion show in Toronto, and I was watching the whole set come together, and I couldn't believe it was real. It was the first time I really stepped back, and I was like, I'm so lucky to be here. I just looked at Ashley and said, 'This is so cool.'"

college daze

Even with all their success, what they're most focused on right now is something every high school junior can relate to: studying for their SATs. "It's hard, but we're getting through it," Ashley says. So what college are they hoping to head to in the fall of 2004? "Ashley and I would really love to go to New York," says Mary-Kate. "I don't even know if I should say schools I want to go to, because I don't want to jinx myself." You can hear her stress a little bit—she has the usual college-application anxiety, but on top of it, the knowledge that her SAT score and her acceptances (or rejections) could well be leaked to the press.

College will be a very different experience for the Olsen twins. Wherever they end up going to school, they will have a Dualstar office set up there. Robert's plan is for them to star in and produce feature films, and to continue to expand their brand internationally. And it's all an experience that they plan to go through together—they won't even *consider* living apart from each other. "We're inseparable, so I just think that there's no one else I'd want to live with," says Ashley. "I want to share a room with someone closer than a best friend," adds Mary-Kate. From the outside looking in, this may seem a little extreme. You'd think they'd want to use college as an opportunity to learn to live apart instead of relying so heavily on each other. But that's just not who Mary-Kate and Ashley are. These are girls who have had extraordinary experiences together—as a team. And they'd like their team to keep propelling them forward. After all, why mess with success? **B**

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You hear so much about these stars' clothing lines, but guess which one brings home the most bacon? The answer may surprise you.

Celebrity	Net Worth	Clothing Line Label
Mary-Kate (left) and Ashley	\$750 MILLION	Label: mary-kate and ashley
P. Diddy	\$325 MILLION	Label: Sean John
Jennifer Lopez	\$100 MILLION	Label: J.Lo by Jennifer Lopez
Eminem	\$50 MILLION (PROJECTED)	Label: Shady Ltd.