

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

Hollywood's hottest couples are in the spotlight, from first kiss to the last word. *hot!* takes a look at the trials and tribulations of being a celebrity couple ... and some of the sweetest celeb valentines!

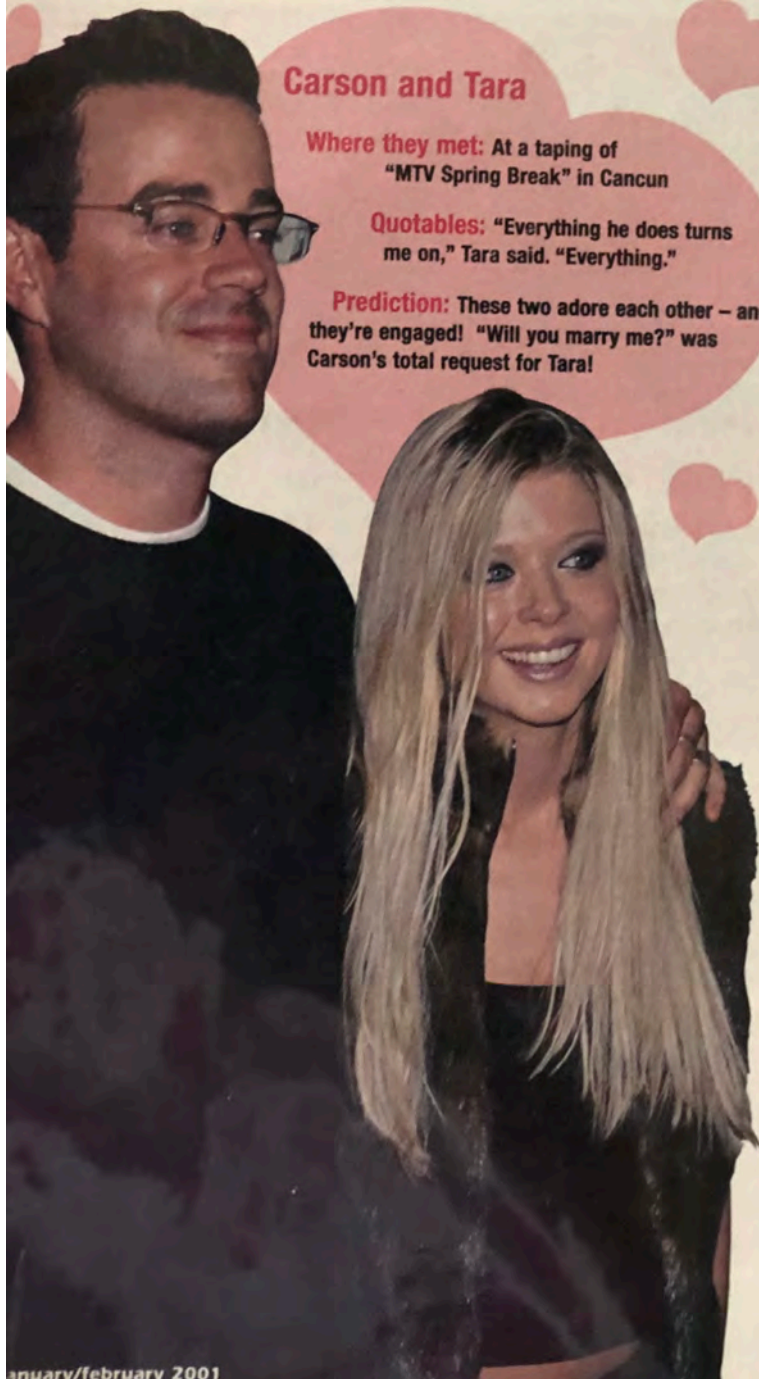
By Erin Brereton

Carson and Tara

Where they met: At a taping of "MTV Spring Break" in Cancun

Quotables: "Everything he does turns me on," Tara said. "Everything."

Prediction: These two adore each other – and they're engaged! "Will you marry me?" was Carson's total request for Tara!



When viewers spied Britney Spears casually chatting up Justin Timberlake at the 2000 MTV Music Video Awards in September, fans were surprised – not that the two were together, but that they had allowed cameras to catch them sitting side by side.

Celebrities may not always broadcast their relationships, but few have been as cleverly concealed as the Britney-Justin courtship. Despite rumors, reports and various sightings, both Britney and Justin's respective camps had denied they were a couple.

But for Britney and Justin – who have known each other since their days on "The New Mickey Mouse Club" – the eyes had it. Rumors followed them for months before Brit finally gave it up in September when she gushed to *Elle* about how she and her boyfriend felt like they were the only two people in a crowded room, referring to him as "J" (and, on occasion, "Justin"). To those who had been following the romance reports on these two for the past year, it didn't take a lot of detective work to figure out who owned that initial.

This was presumably the same Justin whom Britney insisted she was "just friends" with in a February 2000 *People* magazine interview; the same Justin whom she told *Rolling Stone* in May she occasionally cuddled but wasn't serious with; the same Justin she was rumored to be engaged to and/or living with last spring (her publicist denied either was true).

You can hardly blame Brit for a little secrecy – cross-country dating when you're both on tour can't be easy, let alone with half the world watching. But after months of hiding, they both happily admitted they're dating – although they're still quiet about the relationship and are rarely photographed together.

"As long as we know we love each other and we care about each other, we don't have to prove ourselves to the world or whoever else," Justin told *Cosmogirl*.

That's a feeling many celeb couples share — keep it quiet and keep it close. But that's hard when you're constantly in the public eye. Love, Hollywood style: It may give stars the biggest headlines of their careers, but it often starts with secrecy.

I know who you're dating this summer

Some superstar duos make an effort to convince the media that they're not dating. And in the lifestyles of the rich and famous, denial isn't just a river in Egypt. Take, for instance, the multi-named matchup of Sarah Michelle Gellar and Freddie Prinze Jr., both of whom claimed they were "just friends."

The "Buffy" star and her Prinze charming had been friends for a while — they starred together in "I Know What You Did Last Summer," and Freddie often accompanied her to premieres, but they both strongly denied they were dating. Sarah Michelle even went as far as to tell *TV Guide* that was "never a romance" and that Freddie and fellow pal Jerry O'Connell (who starred in "Scream 2" with Sarah Michelle) often accompanied her to premieres because she wouldn't go to such events with romantic interests.

This is the same Sarah Michelle who once said, "I try not to date actors because I know how insecure and crazy we are."

Well, Sarah Michelle, who has also professed a love for privacy, was soon all over town with Freddie, even giving him a long smooch just moments after winning the 2000 MTV Movie Award for best kiss.

Rumor has it they started dating in early 2000 but denied it for months; now, things are much more out in the open. Freddie calls her his girlfriend. Sarah admits they're a couple — but she seems to be the more tight-lipped of the two.

The star who once said, "I don't know how stars who have these big public relationships and breakups get through it," seems to be carefully protecting her pairing.

Total romance live

Carson Daly, MTV's hot "TRL" host, found out the pitfalls of celebrity dating the hard way — by getting dumped. Carson dated "Party of Five"/"Time of Your Life" star Jennifer Love Hewitt for 18 months in 1998-99. The duo struggled to keep the relationship going between coasts (he lived in New York and she lived in Los Angeles)



Britney and Justin

Where they met: As kids, on Disney's "New Mickey Mouse Club" TV show

Quotables: Britney describes Justin as "the cutest thing in the world."

Prediction: With their love of performing in common, these two songbirds have a bright future ahead — and maybe even a duet or two.



with four phone calls a day or more (some as early as 4 a.m.).

The long distance relationship was tough, but seemed to be working.

"It's hard, but it's good when we see each other, so it's worth it,"

Jennifer told *Detour* just before the breakup.

She seemed to have reconsidered at some point after that interview; Carson claims he heard of their breakup on the radio one day and was totally surprised.

"People are like 'She wouldn't do that — she's America's sweetheart,'" Carson said. "But she did. And public breakups are hard. I would walk down the street for the next two weeks and even doormen knew. They were like, 'Dude, that was rough. How you doin'?"

After his relationship with Jennifer ended, Carson vowed not to date famous girls.

"I swore I would never date another actress!" he told *People*. "I can't handle the drama and the games!"

But Carson was game for one more shot at movie star matchups, and hooked up with actress Tara Reid, best known for her role as the



Jessica and Nick

Where they met: At a party in Florida in 1999

Quotables: Nick was telling friends "I'm going to marry that girl" within weeks of meeting her.

Prediction: With all the spottings of these two cooling over each other in restaurants and malls, things look pretty solid.

reluctant girlfriend in "American Pie." The two met in Cancun, Mexico, where they were both filming MTV Spring Break.

Tara, who also resided in California, was more willing to cut the mileage between them: She flew home for a day after the MTV trip to attend the Academy Awards and then moved to New York the next day. The two currently share a place in New York City and got engaged in late October.

The couple seems blissfully happy: No complaints from Carson or from Tara, who told *Cosmopolitan*, "When God decided to make the perfect man, I swear he created Carson."

Thousands of screaming girls outside the MTV Times Square studio agree.

Sweet celeb kisses

Not all star romances start so smoothly. Teen singer Jessica Simpson and 98' member Nick Lachey may look like a close couple now, but Simpson says she was leery of the boy band hunk when their romance started.

The two first met at a party where Jessica performed, and Nick was instantly smitten. Things heated up when she started touring with 98', but

I DO CHERISH YOU

Celeb romances may be a struggle, but are there payoffs? Absolutely. Consider the following happily married stars who stepped off the red carpet and went down the aisle:

Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston

It was as if Hollywood had genetically engineered a perfect couple ... the prince of Hollywood and America's favorite "Friend." It wasn't Pitt's first engagement — he slid a ring onto Gwyneth Paltrow's hand in 1997, but the two broke up before making it to the altar — but on July 29, 2000, he and Jennifer married in Malibu, California.

They had been dating for about two years, but fans caught on when a photographer snapped a candid cuddly picture of the two at a rock concert.

Their \$1 million wedding included 200 guests, 50,000 flowers, four bands, a gospel choir and fireworks. Word of the wedding leaked just days before the ceremony, but the couple was able to keep it fairly private.

Reese Witherspoon and Ryan Phillippe

Some fans didn't even know Reese and Ryan were dating when they announced Reese was pregnant and they were engaged. Still, Hollywood couldn't have created a cuter couple.

The two were involved before they starred together in "Cruel Intentions" (as love interests, no less) but announced their engagement and pregnancy around the time the film was released. They had been dating for about two years when they tied the knot in South Carolina.

Reese had previously told *Allure*

that she was a "nice Southern lady" and faced the difficulties of planning a "nice, big Southern wedding at the spur of the moment," but that's exactly what she did. Baby Ava Elizabeth was born several months later. Both parents continue to work, — Reese's film, "Legally Blonde," is due out next fall, and Ryan is in the film "Anti-Trust."



Jessica was cautious because of the number of girls she saw backstage at the shows.

"At first I was like 'I don't know if I like this,'" Simpson told *People* last March. "But Nick said, 'Trust has to be the core of our relationship.'"

The couple seems to have moved past any doubts — now they're everywhere, from kissing at midnight on MTV's 2000 New Year's celebration to visiting each other's video shoot sets. Nick and Jessica even recorded a popular duet together, "Where You Are."

That's a wrap!

Being a celebrity couple is hard. Broadcasting your insecurities, heartache and most personal moments to the world would take its toll on any couple. But there's definitely love in the stars for some actors, actresses, musicians and personalities. After all, love may be one of the biggest themes in movies, but sometimes it happens off the screen, too! ❤️

Freddie and Sarah Michelle

Where they met: Freddie and Sarah starred in "I Know What You Did Last Summer."

Quotables: When reporters teased Freddie about his comments that his girlfriend could out-eat him, a playful Sarah Michelle replied, "It's a shame that Freddie is gonna go home by himself tonight."

Prediction: This couple seems content to smolder outside of the public eye — as long as they're quiet, things will probably stay sweet!



Kevin
and
Kristin

Backstreet Brides: Kevin Richardson and Kristin Willits and Brian Littrell and Leighanne Wallace

Backstreet fans had a rough Valentine's Day last year when they learned not just one but two BSB members would be getting married. In what can only be called the heartbreak heard 'round the world, cousins Kevin

Richardson and Brian Littrell stepped forward to say that, yes, they would both take brides in the coming year.

The lucky ladies? Kevin wed Kristin Willits, a dancer he had met back in his days as a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle at Walt Disney World (she was in the "Beauty and the Beast" review). Although the couple had split several times over distance issues (she lived in Los Angeles, while he resided in Florida), *People* reported that Kevin decided he wanted it that way and proposed at a bed-and-breakfast the couple had visited before. The two were married in June and have since been spotted at Madonna's "Music" album release party and other hot spots.

Brian met his wife, Leighanne Wallace, when she worked as an extra on the set of BSB's video for "As Long As You Love Me." And she apparently did — they went out for Italian food that night and started dating almost immediately. After dating a little more than two years,

Brian proposed on Christmas night with a canary yellow diamond engagement ring, according to *People*. They married in September in Atlanta, with all the other Backstreet Boys in attendance. ❤️



Brian
and
Leighanne