

Lauren Morris arrives at The Savoy in an Aston Martin convertible, flanked by three George Clooney lookalikes. Her bold pink made-to-order silk dress, painstakingly designed over two months, cost £3,000 and glitters softly courtesy of 100 Swarovski crystals individually sewn on to the fabric.

She is wearing a £28,000 diamond watch and £1,000 pink sapphire diamond ring. As she steps out of the car and on to the red carpet at the luxury London hotel, she is greeted by the flash of cameras from hundreds of screaming fans.

Smiling serenely, almost regally, she surveys the crowd before stepping into the opulent Lancaster Ballroom. It is, frankly, an entrance that would have Victoria Beckham choking on her

By **Antonia Hoyle**

edamame beans in envy. But Lauren is not an international celebrity, millionaire model or wealthy wife of an entrepreneur. She is a schoolgirl from Essex and this is her 16th birthday party.

The event is being filmed for My Super Sweet 16, a series which is broadcast from tonight on MTV. It showcases the excessive birthday celebrations of some of Britain's most spoilt, deluded and demanding teenagers. The episode featuring Lauren can be seen this Thursday.

The American version of My Super Sweet 16 is already a hit. Parents there are required to spend more than £50,000 to make their daughter or son's birthday party eligible for film-

ing. Although there is no minimum budget for the British version, it is set to enthrall and appal in equal measure.

The teenagers narrate the shows themselves and all have one objective – to host the biggest, brashiest, costliest 16th, 17th or 18th birthday party possible, making themselves the most popular person in their group in the process and assuming a quasi-'superstar' status.

In an age of celebrity, where anyone desperate – and rich – enough can get their 15 minutes of fame, the series is a depressing indictment of our next generation's goals and aspirations.

As Lauren says: 'This is the most important thing that ever happened to me and I will do everything in my power to make sure it's amazing. Money shouldn't be an object. You're only young once.'

MTV does not supply detailed information about the teenagers involved, which is surprising given their exhibitionist personalities. The youngsters are often referred to only by their first name and we rarely learn of the professions of their parents or the towns in which they live.

All we are told about Lauren is that she lives with her mum and 'very generous dad' and that when she flexes his credit card 'I always come back with literally everything I want'.

Her wardrobe is stuffed with designer clothes and her handbag collection includes examples from Burberry, DKNY and Louis Vuitton. Her favourite is a £1,200 Chloe number.

With everything she wants already in her grasp, Lauren's goals for the future are distressingly inevitable. 'I want to be a model and a glamorous WAG, mainly because they're in the glossy magazines,' she says, without a trace of irony.

She chooses two of her birthday presents – the £28,000 diamond watch and £1,000 ring – with a couple of fawning friends. It's not clear whether they also have unlimited access to their own fathers' credit cards but they're obviously in awe of Lauren's.

'All the jewellery you're wearing costs more than some people's houses,' one of the friends comments, more impressed than disturbed by such decadence.

Lauren, who has employed the services of Coleen McLoughlin's party planner, retorts: 'I need to make sure my dad gets it for me because I think all my friends will be expecting me to be dripping in diamonds.'

Indeed, peer pressure is all-encompassing and fear of what Lauren's friends will think increases as her big day approaches.

With first impressions counting for everything, her father hired a helicopter from which Lauren handed out her party invitations. 'I was really impressed by everyone's reaction,' she says afterwards. 'I had so much attention on me.'

She had booked a nightclub called 24London, at a cost of £30,000, for the big event, but the day before her party the club pulled out and she was forced to switch to The Savoy – a venue she has never heard of.

'What are all my friends going to think? What is this place – is it cheap?' she asks, eyes wide with terror.

Still, as she cuts into her three-tiered, diamante-studded cake and accepts a Tiffany bracelet bearing 20 diamonds from her adoring father, she seems to have got over the horror of having to change her plans.

Tears and tantrums are also on the cards for 16-year-old Chantel from Surrey ('One of the wealthiest counties in the UK,' she gleefully informs us), who lives 'in a big mansion, I don't know how many rooms', and wants 'to do something big and over-the-top'.

Chantel – a spray-tanned, fake-nailed diva with a penchant for Louboutin handbags – and her equally brash, bottle-blond mother have chosen a circus theme for her party and she will make her grand entrance astride a pink fluffy trapeze.

With a simple email or card from Clinton obviously inadequate, Chantel has employed a stilt-walker to visit her school with her party invitations, which features a picture of her wearing a red silk jumpsuit.

'I feel like royalty, I am royalty, I'm

Chantel!' she squeals as she is photographed for the invitation.

Her excitement is short-lived, however, as her parents struggle to line up a 'performer' to appear at her bash. 'I'll be mortified if I have someone no one's ever heard of,' she cries as even her cats get their nails painted, fur dried and tiaras put in position for the occasion.

Although her first choice, P Diddy, is unavailable, American rap star Sean Kingston has agreed to turn up – encouraged, no doubt, by the promise of MTV exposure – and she happily shows him her new Cartier watch and Tiffany bracelet on the dancefloor.

Imogen Becksfield is about to turn 17, lives in the Cotswolds and owns a pony called Chocolate Button. While her background is not made clear, she seems, on the surface at least, to be from more aristocratic stock than Lauren and Chantel and is demanding a party that is 'going to establish me in society'.

In her clipped vowels, she adds: 'I really need to impress Londoners – they have high expectations. I'm hoping for an

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Party animals... Chantel, far left, with one of her cats which had its claws painted for the occasion. Right: Her three-tier cake. Left: Andre arrives in a limo with glamour model Danielle Lloyd. Bottom right: Imogen rides her pony that she had painted to look like a zebra



It's the new cult TV show – and the only thing you need to do to star in it is be a teenager with a ridiculously over-the-top birthday party. These youngsters get everything from George Clooney lookalikes to diamond-studded watches and Porsches, and all they have to say is...

THANK YOU, DADDY

Eton and Marlborough crowd. I want it to be covered by Tatler, and the Prince of Belgium is coming.'

She hands out her invitations (a ritual that is obviously a crucial part of a teenager's party nowadays) on a horse-drawn carriage and has planned an around the world-themed party, for which she is dressing as a zebra. She wants her pony, on which she will be making her entrance to the party, to be made up as a zebra, too.

When her efforts to paint Chocolate Button with white stripes fail – he becomes a fuzzy blur instead – she demands a real zebra as a replacement, 'if not from the West Midlands Safari Park, then from Africa'.

Presumably, she's aiming for exotic glamour with the dyed-white ponytail flowing from her black beehive, but the effect is more Amy Winehouse dipped in icing sugar than debutante. And, alas, on the night itself, the 'Prince of Belgium' is nowhere in sight.

Although most of the teenagers featured in the series are girls, Andre

Spence, celebrating his 18th birthday, is a notable exception. The Essex boy is every bit as ostentatious as his female counterparts.

He posed for his invitation in a long white sheepskin coat, looking, by his own estimation at least, 'macho, moody and sexy'.

The theme for his party, to be held in a local nightclub, is white and it seems to be only the long-suffering venue manager, Nathan, who stops him bringing in perfume-sprayed sheep.

Instead, dwarves wearing white suits with angel wings attached to their jackets open the doors to his white limo. Andre emerges with glamour model Danielle Lloyd, herself most famous for dating a string of footballers.

Presumably she came cheaper than Sean Kingston as she stays for only a matter of minutes, missing the moment Andre discovers a gold Rolex

nestling in his three-tiered cake that comes complete with a picture of the birthday boy himself on it.

Sweet 16 parties are not uncommon in America, a product of high society's 'coming-out' celebrations. Yet 'sweet' seems to be as inopportune a description of the American parties as it is of their British successors.

Among the girls in the American series was Geri, whose grandfather, we are told, 'invented Spam', and who threw a Rocky Horror Show-themed party complete with drag queen and other cross-dressing guests.

Kat, from Palm Springs, California, had a Caribbean-themed bash aboard the old Queen Mary cruise liner moored in Long Beach. She arrived by helicopter and was given a \$100,000 Porsche.

Alexandria, known as 'the rich girl' at her school in Sacramento, California, staged a Heaven-themed party with guests all in white, and a fashion show in which she starred in a swimsuit with giant wings on the back, like

a Victoria's Secret model.

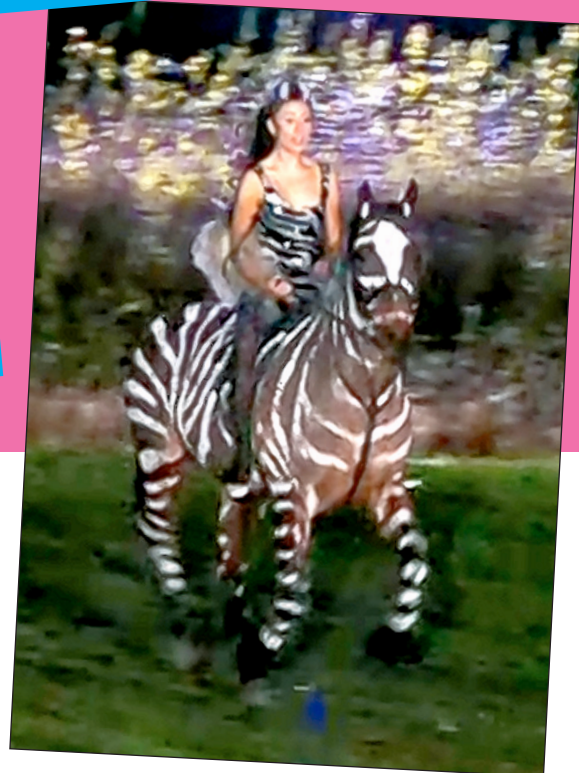
She received a new Cadillac as her birthday present.

Of course, as with all reality TV, all is not exactly as it seems. In America the glittering facade fell from one episode featuring Ariel Milby, the daughter of an oil millionaire from Campbellsville, Kentucky.

Officials were outraged to see Ariel's father Gary throwing the lavish birthday bash, especially as he owes \$1million in fines and court-ordered restitution to investors in Arizona over an alleged fraud.

'Let me tell you, that show is absolutely a bunch of b*****', said Mr Milby last June.

'MTV plays that thing up, you know. They staged pretty much everything but I had very little to do with that



party.' He claimed his ex-wife and Ariel's stepfather paid for the party and he denied buying his daughter a new BMW and expensive jewellery, as the show suggests.

Whatever the truth, it's clear that both American and British series have little to do with the teens' coming of age and entrance into adulthood and more to do with the crippling excesses of fame and capitalism that have come to symbolise our society.

● Additional reporting by Peter Sheridan