

'CORONATION STREET' STAR SAMIA SMITH

ON HOW SHE'S ENJOYING WEDDED BLISS – AND THE TRUTH ABOUT THOSE RUMOURS SHE'S QUITTING THE SOAP TO HAVE A BABY



Samia and Matt tied the knot last September and are loving being Mr and Mrs Smith. "The vows meant a lot to me," she says. "We've both gone into it believing we'll be together for life"

DRESS: DEBRA OF CHIGWELL. SHOES: RICKY OF EDGEWARE. TIARA: PEARL FLORIST. ROMFORD. NECKLACE: OTAZU

Actress Samia Smith (née Ghadie), who plays hairdresser Maria Sutherland in *Coronation Street*, is keen to set the record straight over a recent newspaper report that she is to quit the soap to start a family.

"I found out about the story in the most hurtful way," she reveals. "My father learned about it first and rang me at eight in the morning to ask if it was true. I could hardly believe my ears. The story was a complete fabrication; in fact, the opposite was true. Far from wanting to leave the show, I knew I was about to start work on a really exciting new storyline."

Samia rang the press office at Granada, which immediately issued an official denial on her behalf to stop the rumour escalating even further.

At first, Samia couldn't understand where the story might have come from. "Then it dawned on me that their source might have been listening to a conversation I'd had before New Year, during a meal out with friends. One of them had just had a baby, so we talked about babies all night. If the person had been sitting nearby, eavesdropping, he or she might have heard snippets, put two and two together and made five.

"I did say that I'd like to be a young mum, so the only thing I can think of was that the source concocted the story from that.

PHOTO: BRIAN MACKNESS/WENN



"But I'm only 23 and would consider myself to be a young mum even if I waited until I was 30. Also, it's such a sexist idea that you can't have a baby and work – women do it all the time. There is absolutely no way I'd quit *Corrie* to have a baby. There are quite a few women on the show with young families and they manage perfectly well."

Apart from this recent blip in her fortunes, Samia considers herself a very lucky young woman. "I've got a fantastic job and I'm married to the most romantic man on the planet!" She is, of course, referring to property developer Mathew Smith, 30, her husband of five months.

Surrounded by 150 friends and family, including a large contingent from *Coronation Street's* cast and crew, Samia and Matt tied the knot at St Philip's Church in Alderley Edge, Cheshire. They then celebrated in a huge marquee in the grounds of their Cheshire home.

Blushing, Samia recalls the moment she told Matt she wanted to hold their

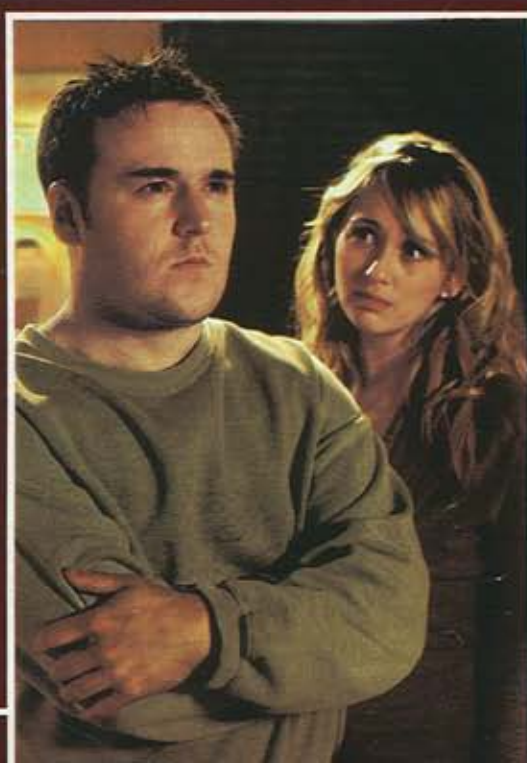
wedding reception there. "We'd only been going out together for three months when Matt viewed the house and decided to buy it. I fell in love with it, too. As soon as I saw the gorgeous garden I looked at him and said, 'This is perfect. We can get married here.' I'm sure he thought I was a bunny-boiler!"

But Matt was just as smitten with Samia. The couple met at a charity event for the Wish Upon a Star Appeal, at which point Samia had been single for a year.

"Meeting Matt was a turning point," she reveals. "Like me, he'd been on his own for a while. He came along at just the right time. We met on a Saturday, went out on our first date the following Tuesday and have been together ever since. We were talking about marriage within a couple of weeks because we just knew we were meant to be."

Matt's proposal was incredibly romantic, as Samia knew it would be. "I really thought he was going to propose on Christmas morning. Everyone around me was dropping hints ►

While Samia is blissfully happy settling down to married life, her *Coronation Street* character Maria has been having a rather more turbulent time. Her relationship with boyfriend Tyrone, played by Alan Halsall (pictured right), has finally come to an end, heralding a new chapter in her life. Samia is enjoying getting her teeth into such a meaty storyline. "It's very exciting," she reveals. "Maria has got this great opportunity"





that they knew something I didn't, and friends were giving me these little secret looks and smiles. Then, on Christmas Day, he handed me an envelope. My hands were shaking a bit when I opened it. Inside were two tickets to Rome."

A few days later the couple flew to Italy to celebrate New Year. When the aircraft landed in Rome, a limousine whisked them to the luxurious Western Excelsior Hotel. "It was so exciting, so romantic," recalls Samia. "The hotel was just amazing."

Ever thoughtful, Matt had booked a suite with three balconies, each with spectacular views over the city. "I was so excited," says Samia. "I put on my best outfit, spent extra time on my hair and make-up and anticipated Matt's proposal to me as the clock struck midnight."

However, despite the romantic setting and a champagne dinner, Matt failed to pop the question – and Samia

could barely hide her disappointment. "It was such an anti-climax that I ended up getting drunk," she confesses. "Matt had to tuck me up in bed."

The next day Matt announced that he had planned for them to go to the Vatican, to hear the Pope's New Year message to the people. As Samia recalls: "I put on some casual clothes for sightseeing and it was then I

realised that Matt was becoming agitated. He said, 'Aren't you going to get a bit more dressed-up? After all, we are going to see the Pope.'"

Though a bit put out by Matt's comment, Samia thought nothing more about it until they got to the Vatican. "I could see that the Pope was just about to come out onto the balcony, but Matt was frantically

searching for something in his pocket. Suddenly the penny dropped, and Matt went down on one knee. He started telling me how much he loved me and wanted us to be together forever, then it all became a bit of a blur."

Matt slipped a diamond engagement ring on Samia's finger and they both started laughing. "I was giggling so much, I can't even remember saying 'Yes'," she says. "It was so magical. Then we spent the most wonderful day together – going to cafés and chatting and, of course, ringing family and friends to tell them our news." That day, Samia's mum was having lunch with Matt's mum. When they learned the news, everyone started cheering.

Now, several months on from their wedding, Samia and Matt are settling into married life. "We were already living together, but being married is different. The vows mean a lot to me

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and I like having the same name. We've both gone into it believing we'll be together for life."

But despite being madly in love, Samia is adamant that her career means more to her than ever. "One of the reasons I'm so happy now is that I've achieved the right balance. My career is very important, but so, too, is my life outside the *Street*."

She's relishing the fact that her character Maria is currently enjoying a high-profile storyline. "Maria's relationship with Tyrone reached make-or-break point," she explains. "He wanted them to get married, so entered a competition in the *Weatherfield Gazette* to win a free wedding. That was when the cracks started to appear. Tyrone was much more up for the idea than Maria."

The realisation prompted Tyrone, played by Alan Halsall, to end their rocky romance once and for all. "There came a point when Tyrone knew that Maria would never love him in the way that he loved her," says Samia. "In the end he came round to thinking that if he's not good enough for her, then she's not good enough for him."

Far from being a disaster, Samia feels that the break with Tyrone represents a great opportunity for Maria. "It comes at a time when Audrey Roberts [played by Sue Nicholls] decides to sell the salon, and Maria is frontrunner to buy it. We are already seeing a change in her. She's looking a lot more professional – wearing pencil skirts and high heels – and I think this is the start of a whole new chapter."

Her life and that of her character could not be more different right now. Just as Samia is settling down in real life, Maria is embarking on a period of complete change.

"I love the fact that Maria has got this great opportunity. I've grown up with her and, despite all her failings, I like her. She's always been a bit of a 'hussy', but this experience – with Tyrone dumping her, and a chance at last of a fulfilling career – will be the making of her."

Apart from getting her teeth into her juicy storyline, Samia is also looking forward to the challenges of married life with Matt. "We love being together and are looking forward to doing more travelling. There are so many places we'd like to go before we decide to try for a baby – I want to have lots to tell my children."

One thing is for sure: Samia is determined to juggle family life with her career. "For me, being happy in my personal life *and* my career is definitely enjoying the best of both worlds." **H**

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(LEFT) DRESS: DEBRA OF GHIGWELL. SANDALS: RICKY OF EDGEWARE. NECKLACE: OTAZU. EARRINGS & ARMLET: SWAROVSKI. (RIGHT) COAT: DEBRA OF GHIGWELL. SHOES: RICKY OF EDGEWARE. EARRINGS: OTAZU



Samia insists there was no truth to a recent report that she's planning to quit *Corrie* and start a family. Although she and Matt would love to have children in the future, she's in no rush at 23 and hopes to find time to do more travelling with Matt first. "There are so many places we'd like to go – I want to have lots to tell my children"