

Winners and losers of wedding fever...

KATE MIDDLETON may be the one true winner when she marries her Prince on Friday, but who else will be benefiting from the Royal Wedding and who will be losing out? JILL FOSTER takes a look at some very surprising statistics...

FOR RICHER...

Hearing aids

THOSE who can see the Royal Wedding on TV but cannot hear so well are ensuring their day isn't spoilt. HearingDirect.com has seen a 25 per cent increase in sales of Wireless TV Listeners — allowing the hard of hearing to turn up the volume without disturbing everyone else in the room.

Phone companies

PHONE companies expect a surge in international calls, as people from overseas chat to friends in Britain about the occasion. Tesco International Calling Card, which people can use to pay for calls abroad, is predicting a 100 per cent uplift in international calls compared to a regular Friday. The biggest gossips are expected to be Americans.

Call handlers

MANY offices will be empty on the Big Day — but that doesn't mean they want to lose customers. Independent call handlers cover phones for businesses while staff are away and can book appointments and take messages. One call handler — Moneypenny — says it has seen a 40 per cent increase in demand for the Royal Wedding day.

Dark-haired lonely hearts

BRITISH women who are wealthy, dark-haired and well-spoken are more desirable than ever across the Atlantic. Introduction agency Berkeley International says its New York office has seen a 20 per cent increase in the past six months of American men looking for their perfect partner to fit the description of the bride-to-be.

Morning suit firms

ONLINE formal wear retailer mytuxedo.co.uk has seen a surge in sales of morning suits — up by 81 per cent on this time last year — to guests hoping to show some regal panache when attending other weddings over the coming months. Sales of waistcoats are up by 48 per cent, cravats up by 58 per cent and top hats by 16 per cent.

Eastenders

THE capital's hotels will see a huge influx of tourists next weekend. Bookings website laterooms.com says it is areas in the east of the capital, not normally popular with tourists, that are benefiting the most — Bow, Plaistow, Elephant and Castle and West Ham — as those on a budget hunt farther afield from the pricey hotspots.

Luvvies

THE capital's theatres are likely to cash in to the tune of £8.4 million. Ticket exchange Viagogo reports that it has seen a 35 per cent uplift on theatre ticket sales compared to the Easter weekend last year. New shows such as Shrek The Musical are most popular with Brits

heading to London, while Europeans prefer to see longer running shows such as The Lion King. Meanwhile, visitors from the U.S. are more likely to opt for Shakespeare.

Debenhams

KATE'S sapphire-and-diamond engagement ring, inherited from Princess Diana, is worth over £250,000. Wannabe princesses on a tight budget are going for Debenhams' £6 replica engagement ring — the store's fastest-ever-selling piece of jewellery.

The French

CHAMPAGNE sales have tripled over the past few weeks compared to last year, according to wine merchant Bordeaux Index. One client has splashed out £6,000 on 20 cases of Pol Roger Non Vintage for a particularly high-end street party.

Republicans

NOT everyone is looking forward to the Royal Wedding, though. Republic, the campaign group for a democratic alternative to the wedding, has seen membership double to 14,000 since the engagement was announced. Sales of its £3.99 'I'm Not A Royal Wedding Mug' are also soaring.

...FOR POORER

The economy

AS BRITAIN will be open for business for only three days between April 22 and May 2, thanks to Easter, the Royal Wedding and the May Bank Holiday, the country could lose as much as £6 billion in productivity. However, it's likely to claw back around £1 billion of that in extra tourist revenue and memorabilia sales.

Coach companies

THANKS to people cancelling business or school trips because of the extra bank holiday, coach companies are

expecting to lose thousands of pounds in revenue. Prospect Coaches, based in Stourbridge, estimates it will lose around £13,500 in lost bookings — mainly from schools.



English healthcare workers

EMPLOYEES of English healthcare and Primary Care Trusts will lose out on bank holiday pay rates after the bodies refused to recognise the Royal Wedding day as a bank holiday. While NHS trusts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have agreed to pay their staff the agreed bank holiday rates, English employees will go without.

Westminster drivers

HUNDREDS of people who live in the borough of Westminster will be banned from parking their cars outside their homes for nearly 40 hours, as part of security measures. They'll have to fork out huge amounts for any nearby alternatives.

Bookies

BETTING shops have paid out thousands of pounds to punters who correctly predicted the wedding date. Ladbrokes said it sustained a £200,000 loss when the engagement was announced and was hit again with news of the April 29 date. A spokesperson blamed a 'royal leak', as several punters were placing three and four-figure bets before the announcement was made.

ITV

THE television company will screen the Royal Wedding without commercial breaks, under rules set to cost the broadcaster as much as £8 million in lost revenue. Broadcasting watchdog Ofcom says commercial breaks are prohibited during a 'formal royal ceremony'. Presenters Phillip Schofield and News at Ten's Julie Etchingham will present continuous coverage of the marriage.

DIY

FRIDAY may be an extra bank holiday, but that doesn't mean we'll be getting near a stepladder or paintbrush. In fact, nearly 95 per cent of the 2,000 people questioned in a recent survey by consumer finance company Hitachi Capital reveal they will not be doing any DIY on the day of the Royal Wedding.

Why I

FOR so many of us, it is difficult to avoid the haunting comparison. When willowy Kate Middleton goes walkabout wearing an elegant suit and that optimistic smile, it's the woman who would have been her mother-in-law who springs disconcertingly to mind.

Diana was, of course, the last beautiful young woman to marry an heir to the throne — precipitating a fashion fever and thousands of young girls' dreams of wearing a puff-ball dress as they were swept off their feet by their prince.

Just like Diana before her marriage, Kate Middleton can start a trend in minutes. This time, it's royal blue and fitted tweed rather than knickerbockers and pie-crust collars.

Like Diana, Kate seems to be a natural at meeting 'ordinary' people. She has happily flipped pancakes in Belfast, and christened a lifeboat with champagne in Anglesey. These appearances have been deemed 'triumphs' by Palace aides.

Certainly, with her striking looks and personable manner, Kate is a hit with the public; and yet I sense that Britain is not as gripped by the joyous wedding anticipation as the monarchy and the British Establishment might wish.

Is it because the sad life and untimely death of Diana disabused us for ever of the notion of royal fairytales? Certainly, if anyone did still believe in them, that was shattered by the follow-up collapse of Prince Andrew and Fergie's marriage.

The truth is that Charles and Diana's was a wedding that made fools of us all: an intoxicating charade, a marriage masquerading as a love match when, on one side at least, it was nothing of the sort.

We later discovered, in painful detail, that the glamorous do-gooding and jet-setting life of the world's favourite cover-girl masked inner turmoil and profound isolation.

After her shocking death, the outpouring of public sympathy for Princes William and Harry was on a scale unimaginable for the normally uptight British. This was then followed by national queasiness over the mass mawkishness of the grief itself.

So no wonder we don't quite know how to react to this very modern royal romance. The spectre of Diana's lonely anguish and wavering self-esteem is still fresh in our minds.

It doesn't help that Kate wears Diana's ring. It also doesn't help that as Kate prepares to be married in front of at least a billion people and enters the Royal goldfish bowl, her weight loss and slightly nervous appearance make us all anxious on her behalf. We feel as protective of her as we felt of William and Harry after their mother's death.

Whether the Palace shares these qualms is another matter.

Of course, it is quite understandable that they are delighted by Kate's popularity. After all, as hugely respected as she is, the Queen was 85 on Thursday, and Philip is about to turn 90. They will be well aware that the hopes of the monarchy rest on the slight shoulders of a 29-year-old middle-class girl.

Which is why I so worry that the expectations being placed on Kate by courtiers — who one hopes would have learned a lesson from the Diana debacle — are simply too great.

Actress Emma Watson is no stranger to the prying attentions of the public after finding early fame in the Harry Potter films, but even she said last week that she wouldn't be able to cope with the attention Kate Middleton is getting.

'Poor girl, that must be an incredible amount of pressure ... it must be intense,' she sympathised.

Pre-wedding weight loss is rarely significant: most brides lose at least half a stone before their big day. I have seen more than one corset gaping loosely on a bride's suddenly skinny frame.

'Diana went down two dress sizes in the three months before her wedding,' says Elizabeth Emmanuel, who made Diana's gown. 'I did note how slim Kate was looking.'

Kate, it must be stressed, is marrying in altogether happier circumstances than Diana. She is around the same age as her husband-to-be, and



by Catherine Ostler

ten years older than Diana was when she married. Kate has known her prince for nearly ten years; there is no third person in their relationship; and no one doubts that theirs is a love match and he will be her greatest support.

Equally, unlike Diana, whose mother famously bolted, Kate is a girl from a stable background who seems to be blessed with a tough middle-class resilience.

The flipside of the 'Waity Katie' jibes is that she seems to possess great steel, even when she and William broke up for a while.

Conversely, Diana's fragility and self-obsession was one of the reasons her life turned into a compelling drama: you simply never knew what she would do next.

Claudia Bradby, a jewellery designer who worked with Kate Middleton at Jigsaw Junior (and whose ITN journalist husband Tom conducted the Royal couple's first interview), certainly thinks Kate is a good fit for life at the palace.

'I found her charming and really rather impressive: focused, creative, thoughtful and kind. The Royal Family is very lucky to have her.'

Another key factor in Kate's favour is that William is a charismatic head-turner himself. While Charles was said to feel excluded by, and envious of, the excitement that followed his bride, there is a sense that the public won't mind which one they get on a walkabout — Kate and William offer equal allure.

And despite her middle-class background, Kate has received more royal training than the aristocratic Diana. She is familiar with the Royal milieu, having already swum in its waters for years.

A palace source said: 'She is well-known to the family and has spent time at the Queen's private residences, as well as those of the Prince of Wales, which will have given her an insight into what happens in these surroundings away from the public eye.'

It is also to her advantage that, unlike Diana, Kate is not marrying the direct heir to the throne. Her initial schedule will be lighter than Diana's, particularly while William is still in the services.

The Royals are also deeply aware that in those difficult times they did not supply enough support to Diana, who for years after the break-up was the victim of vicious smears by Charles's camp.

While Kate will have no shortage of police protection, and advice on diplo-