

Fertile ground

Offspring star **KAT STEWART** says the show has taught her a lot about life, love, family – and getting her timing right

“I hold *Offspring* responsible for me getting pregnant the first time,” Kat Stewart laughs, but she’s not joking. When asked what impact the popular Ten drama has had on her life, the now 43-year-old says the show made her realise time might be running out to have kids — so she did something about it. “I’m serious,” she says. “I was so caught up with work and I had to do a whole lot of research on fertility and IVF for Billie’s storyline. I was 37 or 38 and I looked at [the research] and thought, ‘Oh hang on, I might be playing with fire here — I better get on with this.’ I’m eternally grateful that the writers kind of forced me to deal with the facts, so that’s a huge thing.”

After having Archie four years ago, Stewart, who is married to actor David Whiteley, now also has a little girl named Gigi. She was born weeks before filming started earlier this year on season six. Despite the rumours, Stewart hadn’t been expecting *Offspring* to be renewed and so she was pleasantly surprised twice — both about the show coming back and her pregnancy. Having worked on *Offspring* when Archie was a newborn, Stewart knew she’d be able to juggle playing Billie and caring for Gigi at the same time.

“It’s all very close together and quite hectic but a great problem to have and Gigi’s a great little baby. She’s managed really well and she’s sleeping every day. I did the same thing with Archie; I had him halfway through series three.

“You probably wouldn’t do it this way on purpose but we’ve managed pretty well and it’s

Wednesdays
at 8.30pm
on **TEN**



GROWING UP
Billie (Kat Stewart) (left) is the older sister to Nina (Asher Keddie) and helps her with her daughter Zoe.

a very inclusive workplace. I’m very lucky that I’ve got a work that is so supportive and encouraging for me to have my baby with me.”

Though vague about Billie’s journey in season six, with many plot points being kept under wraps to surprise fans, one thing is certain and that’s Billie and Mick (Eddie Perfect) are still together after their reunion in season five. Billie has been overseas with her musician hubby in the 18 months between seasons. According to Stewart, we’ll see a more assured Billie than in past seasons because of her age and the challenges she’s faced since we first met Nina’s (Asher Keddie) brassy eldest sister.

“A lot happened in series four and five with her marriage break-up and then with her relationship with Lawrence [Ido Drent] — I think she learnt a lot about herself with that. She’s older, we’re all seven years older than when we first began, and that’s when decisions in your 30s are made about life partners, babies, careers, families and priorities. That’s certainly been our experience but also the character’s experience.

“I think she’s grown up a lot just through life and I think there’s a sense of mortality too that comes when you get a little bit older so that’s there as well ... but she’s still a bit nuts and impetuous and no filters — all of that is very much intact. It’s not like she’s gone all serious by any stretch. She’s still Billie but she’s got more responsibilities now — I think that’s a big part of it.”

One of Billie’s responsibilities is helping to parent Zoe, her sister Nina’s daughter with late anaesthetist Patrick (Matthew Le Nevez) whose shock death after being hit by a car still brings *Offspring* fans to tears.

It’s a role Billie gladly takes on not only because of her fierce love for Nina but because she has always wanted a child of her own. Stewart believes this story arc beautifully represents a situation for many women and society in general.

“I kind of love the fact that they didn’t write either of my pregnancies into the show because that could have been an option,” she explains. “I like that it’s a show about babies ... and Billie’s always

“You can find families in all different shapes and sizes and *Offspring*’s a show that really embraces that.”

wanted a baby but we all know it doesn’t happen for everyone. It’s not the recipe for happiness for everyone.

“I love that they didn’t give her a traditional baby but that she’s still able to have a baby in her life. Families don’t have to be traditional. You can find families in all different shapes and sizes and *Offspring*’s a show that really embraces that and I think that’s a really great thing.”

Once production of season six wraps, Stewart’s next project is the play *Disgraced* for the Melbourne Theatre Company. After that there are a couple of “interesting” things Stewart, who rose to fame in the original *Underbelly*

series, is looking at doing next year. Of course one of the productions *Offspring* fans hope will be on her calendar next year is season seven of the hit drama but Stewart is hedging her bets and not assuming anything until she gets the official yes or no.

If *Offspring* does come back in 2017, Stewart has some ideas in mind for what she’d like for Billie. As always it would mean Billie’s trademark blunt-talking, outrageous personality would get a full work-out.

“I would love her to go into politics. Not like big-league politics, just council politics — small, so that she could get into fights with neighbours! I think that’d be fun.” **TVS**

Words by Rachael Gavin