

ing and racing business involving some 60 Thoroughbreds and a 35-acre Santa Barbara spread called Clairmont Farm. "David," says Meryl, "is absolutely on target. A lot of people in rock have died or been impaired by drugs or whatever. He is sane, normal and clean-living."

True, but she hardly noticed it when they first met at a 1974 Lexington, Ky. horse sale. "Basically, she hated me," says Cassidy. "I got more attention than she did." Meryl, a savvy horse-woman who was married at the time, wondered just how much he knew about horses. Also, there were those bodyguards of his: "I didn't feel I was relating to another human being."

They saw each other subsequently at various horse events. In 1980 Meryl divorced her husband, Mark Tanz, a Canadian real estate mogul and sometime film producer (*Inside Moves*) who was 15 years her senior. A year later David separated from actress Kay Lenz, whom he had wed in 1977. Then last summer they met by chance at a party before a race at an Illinois track. "Suddenly she and I looked at each other as if for the first time, and WHEW!" marvels David. Adds Meryl: "We haven't been apart since. In his rock days, he was remote. Now he has time for me." They commute from their small Manhattan apartment to an L.A. house and their jointly owned spread in Santa Barbara, where Meryl's daughter, Caroline, 7, is in school. "David," says Meryl, "could live out of a suitcase and be happy. He's taught me a lot about letting go."

Traveling light is part of his stage brat heritage. His late father, Jack Cassidy, won a 1963 Tony for *She Loves Me*. Mother Evelyn Ward took over for Gwen Verdon on Broadway in *New Girl in Town* in 1958. David, she says, "was a very happy child. I used to call him Smilin' Sam." He says he decided to be an actor at 3 in 1953, when he saw his dad in *Wish You Were Here*. The next year Jack left his wife, eventually marrying Shirley Jones (who played David's *Partridge Family* mother). Young Cassidy was raised by his mom and her parents in West Orange, N.J. His grandfather, a utility company meter reader, became a surrogate dad, but Jack's absence hurt. "He wouldn't show up half the time he said he'd come," recalls Evelyn.

David started playing piano at 5, and later soloed in the local Episcopal

church choir. When he was 11, he and Evelyn moved to California, where he saw more of his dad. His new family included three half brothers: Shaun, now 24 and acting in *Mass Appeal* in San Francisco; Patrick, 21, who has just finished filming a forthcoming TV movie; and Ryan, 18, a student. After David graduated from high school he went to New York and eventually landed a bit part in a George Abbott musical. Someone from CBS spotted him, and soon he was back in California appearing on *Marcus Welby, M.D.* and other series. Then in 1970 he became Keith Partridge ("He really made the show," says Shirley Jones) and the rest was hysteria.

"I was a kid, not a man," he says of those days. Actually, he was merchandise. His life was taken over by agents. At a Manhattan concert, fans ripped apart a couple of limos thinking he might be in one of them; he had to be smuggled to performances in laundry trucks, and between shows he stayed in his hotel while his pals went out and partied. At 21 he wound up in a hospital having his gallbladder removed. "My body just broke down," he recalls. At a May 1974 London concert some 800 fans fainted or were hurt in a mob crush and one girl subsequently died of a heart attack. Three months later falling ratings killed *The Partridge Family*. The next year Cassidy wearily quit showbiz. Says a friend, Samuel Hyman: "If David hadn't done all those years of seven-day weeks—acting, touring, recording—he might not have been driven to the edge. I think he had to stop for his mental well-being."

For a while Cassidy all but dropped out of sight. He traveled alone, frequently going back and forth to Europe to ski and visit friends. Marty Ingels, the current husband of Shirley Jones, with whom Cassidy had become close, says: "David was eaten by success. He didn't know who he was. Shirley cried the whole time. No one who loved him could reach him."

In 1976 Jack Cassidy—by then totally estranged from David—died at 49 in an accidental fire at his L.A. apartment. "Jack was a big talent. He was intimidated by his son's success," says Ingels. David's view: "Dad was so charismatic. There was a madness in him. And he was wild. It was controlled for most of his life. I'm not sure of that the last few years. I just wish I could have talked to him before he left. I didn't



In 1972 Cassidy rocked Madison Square Garden. "There was a real love exchange with fans," he says. "It kept me going."



Of his younger half brothers, David is closest to Shaun, another teen idol emeritus, who embraces him backstage.

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