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# Why Southern men love the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency

By Harry Mount in Atlanta  
Last Updated: 1:27AM BST 17 Jun 2006

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Stacy Fandos: 'The women are more suspicious'

Stacy Fandos did not look like a typical private detective as she sat in her black BMW on a stake-out. The 41-year-old mother of three had been on the case for weeks, tracking a middle-class architect hooked on drugs whose husband wants custody of their 10-year-old daughter.

Mrs Fandos, a former airline stewardess, is in fact a recent recruit to Busted, the only all-female private eye agency in America.

Inevitably Busted has become know as the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency of the Deep South, after the popular series of books by Alexander McCall Smith. With her hair artfully bunched either side of her face, she is built on a less generous scale that the fictional African detective, Mma Ramotswe, but is no less cunning.

There are many advantages to being a woman private investigator, said Mrs Fandos, as she pulled up in the car park of the architects' practice in an upmarket suburb of Atlanta, 50 yards from where the methamphetamine addict sat at her office window.

"The women are more suspicious. I much prefer getting confronted by men. We just turn on the sex appeal, or play drunk."

The private detective industry business has never been so big, with 80 per cent of the work coming from a bottomless well of clients - the unfaithful. The divorce rate in America is spiralling and the chances of a marriage today ending in divorce are 50 per cent.

Infidelity is the most common cause of divorce and the best evidence of infidelity that stands up in court and wins custody of a child or a handsome

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divorce settlement is photographic.

Busted shots that have won recent court cases have shown close-ups of the philanderer kissing his lover, touching her hair, holding hands or playfully slapping her bottom.

"Women are more aware of being caught than men," said Mrs Fandos, "They're more concerned about the risk, that they're losing their family. Men are sloppier; they're thinking of one thing and they'll deal with the consequences later."

Busted was set up three years ago by Jeanene Weiner, 43, a mother of two whose husband had sold his business, giving her the time and money to start up a new company. "I didn't mean it to be all women," said Mrs Weiner. "But people were so relieved to hear a woman on the end of the phone, particularly men, that I've stuck to women and now I've got 10 on our books.

"Men feel happier opening up to women than other men. And I do believe in female intuition, and that women are more curious and observant than men. We also know how to catch guys out. It's a nurturing thing, too. It's great to get the bust, but it's hard to deliver the news, and we're better at doing that."

On display in Busted's premises in the Marietta suburb of Atlanta are the tools of the trade. Among them are the Teddicam, a fluffy white teddy bear with a camera lens in its left eye. Other cameras are available with lenses hidden in a box of tissues, a binder and a pencil sharpener. Also on show are two bottles of "Check Mate", which when poured on a stain go purple in the presence of semen.

The same test, performed on Monica Lewinsky's dress, served to confirm her liason with the then president Bill Clinton. Once semen is detected, it is sent to a laboratory for DNA testing. There are other useful gadgets. "The Global Positioning System makes surveillance much easier," said Mrs Weiner, as she produced a black box the size of a CD, which fits under the dashboard.

"We're not allowed to fit these, but if a suspicious husband owns the car, then it's within his rights to customise his asset," she said.

Most of Busted's clients are middle-class because the cost of a surveillance campaign goes into the thousands of pounds. Even with the boon of GPS, surveillance can last days, with detectives not coming cheap at £40 an hour.

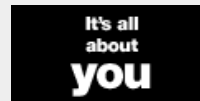
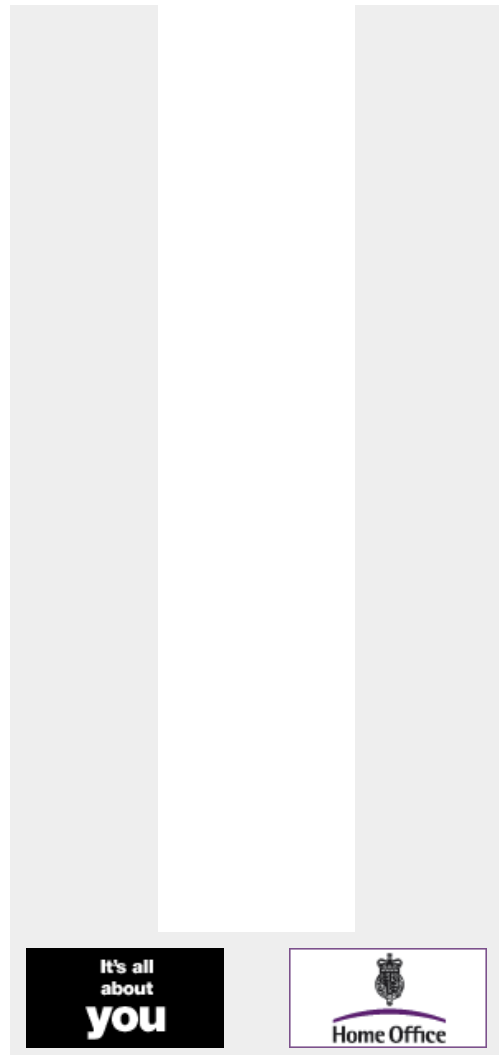
"It's amazing what people are prepared to pay," said Mrs Weiner, "They're much happier paying us everything they have than giving it away in a divorce to a woman who's cheated on them."

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