

Squeaky-clean Astley rocks the changes



Old-style Astley

RICK ASTLEY has undergone a dramatic change. The boy-next-door singer with the shy smile and freckles has been reincarnated into a long-haired, leather-clad rocker.

When he first shot to fame four years ago with *Never Gonna Give You Up*, he was big news. He became the Cinderella success story of the Stock Aitken and Waterman hit factory.

With a broad Lancashire accent, unassuming manner, red hair and squeaky-clean looks he was the world's most unlikely pop star — but that

was the secret of his success. For a year, he belted out hit after hit.

As each single shot into the top ten, Rick became public property. Then, without warning, he left the pop scene to rethink his career.

Now, at 25, he has proved he is back with his second single, *Never Knew Love*.

But he said bluntly of his decision to get out of the spotlight: "I'd had enough and I needed to get away."

"I hated the image that was given to me as 'nice, shy Rick' — it just wasn't me. I couldn't stand all the hype." His decision to get out while he was

still hot was a clever one. Bands from *The Bay City Rollers* to *Bros* have died a natural death when fans tired of them. It's only the stars who keep changing, like *Madonna*, who survive.

"I'm sure everyone thinks it's great suddenly to become famous — and I'd be a liar if I said it was a total nightmare — but nothing can prepare you for what goes on."

"Fame comes at a cost. The price you pay is you're not allowed to be yourself."

Rick now lives in South London with his Danish girlfriend, but they try to keep their affair very private — a lesson

Rick has learned from the past. When his relationship with his childhood sweetheart girlfriend *Jackie Price* ended in tears, Rick was castigated. But he feels the public's reaction was unfair.

"You can't hold it against a 21-year-old that he said one thing and a year later did something different," he says.

"You are exposed to do different things, you grow up and you change."

"I'm more confident as a person and an artist now. I never wanted to be a pop idol. I'm just a pop singer and I'm happiest with that."

LOUISE GANNON



SURE STAR: Rick the rocker