

What would a real life Barbie look like?



By Denise Winterman, March 6, 2009
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She turns 50 on Monday, but Barbie has a remarkable figure for a woman of any age. So what if you scaled her up to human proportions?

For a woman celebrating her half-century Barbie is remarkably unchanged from the young, fresh-faced Wisconsin girl who first came into the world on March 9, 1959. And that's the problem.

Barbie Millicent Roberts is a woman with a very controversial reputation and mostly it stems from her long legs, tiny waist, ample bosom, slender neck and flowing blonde locks.

Some argue her body shape would be unobtainable and unsustainable if scaled up to life-size. They claim she would not be able to stand up because her body frame would be so unbalanced. A real life Barbie would simply fall over.

Can this be true? Her maker, Mattel, says it has never scaled her vital statistics to real-life dimensions. Of those who have - usually critics or academics - no one has come up with a definitive answer as to exactly what her measurements would be.



Real life model Libby (left) and Barbie

Serious research on the subject has drawn certain conclusions. Academics from the University of South Australia suggest the likelihood of a woman having Barbie's body shape is one in 100,000. So not impossible, but extremely rare. Researchers at Finland's University Central Hospital in Helsinki say if Barbie were life size she would lack the 17 to 22% body fat required for a woman to menstruate. So again, not an unachievable figure, but certainly not a healthy one.

But the vital statistics they used in their studies are not readily available. Mattel has a standard set of measurements for Barbie, but dolls can vary slightly so any self-respecting researcher would measure one themselves.

Do the math

So, one trip to the toy shop and one measuring session with "Tricky Triplets Barbie" later, these are the vital statistics the Magazine was left with:

Bust: 4.6ins (11.6cm)
Waist: 3.5ins (8.9cm), and
Hips: 5ins (12.7cm)

Next, step forward our real life model, Libby, aged 27 - who is a slim, but unremarkable size 10/12. Applying Barbie's proportions to Libby's body yields some interesting results.

HOW WOULD A REAL WOMAN LOOK WITH BARBIE'S PROPORTIONS?



If Libby's waist size of 28ins (71.1cm) were to remain unchanged, then applying Barbie's proportions to her would mean Libby shoots up in height, to an Amazonian at 7ft 6ins (2.28m) tall. That's just two inches shorter than the world's tallest woman, Yao Defen. She would also have hips measuring 40ins (101.6cm) and a bust of 37ins (83.9cm).

But what if, instead, Libby's height of 5ft 6ins (1.68m) was to remain unchanged. Doing the math, Libby would have an extraordinarily tight waist of just 20ins (50.8cm), while her bust would be 27ins (68.5cm) and her hips 29ins (73.6cm). Even the famously slight Victoria Beckham reportedly only has a 23ins (58.4cm) waist. But neither are they unheard of - Brigitte Bardot was famous for her 20ins (50.8cm) waist.



"People keep repeating this suggestion that Barbie would fall over and have to crawl around if she was real size, but it's just not the case," says Moira Redmond, writer and Barbie fan. "I find this suggestion more misogynistic than anything Barbie is accused of standing for. It's a nasty, sexual image.

"I've done my own calculations and she definitely doesn't have the dimensions of most people, but they are no means grossly abnormal. I'm sure the measurements of baby dolls aren't accurate but no one criticizes them."

But others insist the proportions are unrealistic at best and damaging at worst.

"Barbie's body shape and proportions are among the many things that play up to this 'thin ideal' which is ubiquitous these days," says Professor Janet Treasure, an expert on body size and image at the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London. "The promotion of dolls with such a body shape, and other things like size zero, have wider public health implications, like an increased risk of eating disorders."

Human Barbie

But one walking, talking "doll" says there's nothing wrong in wanting

to be Barbie-like. Sarah Burge was dubbed the "real-life Barbie" by the press after having plastic surgery reportedly worth £500,000. She has run with the idea, making a lucrative career out of marketing herself as a life-size version of the doll.

"I actually agree she would probably look a bit freaky if life size but as a doll she looks fantastic," she says. "There's nothing wrong in using her as a role model when it comes to looks, as well as attitude to life. At the end of the day you don't see a personality from across a room do you.

"It's empowering for women to be who they want to be and not just live with the body and face they were born with."

And women might be justified in feeling more undermined by the Barbie phenomenon than men. Take Ken - Barbie's long-time model consort. When researchers at the University of South Australia scaled up Mr Barbie to life-size proportions, they concluded that the chances of a man having his body shape is one in 50.

That's a lot more achievable than one in 100,000, giving weight to the argument that pressure is put on girls and women to be an unrealistic size.

But as Ken knows, a good body is no guarantee of happiness. Barbie dumped him on Valentine's Day in 2004, after dating him for more than 43 years. Love her or hate her, she's an independent woman.