

Three ain't easy

MIRROR'S JULIE ON HER FIRST YEAR AS MUM OF TRIPLETS



▲ SWEET DREAMS The 5lb newborns in the Land of Nod



▲ HAPPY Julie, Mike and the girls

It's been a blur of nappy-changing, dribble-dabbing and, of course, copious cuddling



▲ SANTA BABIES Triplets (from left) Elise, Lily and Clara



▲ RUDOLPH WHO? Clara gives Santa Lily a red nose



▲ SWELL Julie last Christmas

Pictures: MARTIN GILFEATHER

EXCLUSIVE
BY JULIE MCCAFFREY
features@mirror.co.uk

ELISE has just clonked Clara on the head with a wooden block, while Lily is playing peek-a-boo from behind the Christmas tree which looks set to topple.
My house looks like a laundrette that's been stirred with a stick. And

I look like the "before" picture of someone in dire need of a makeover. Welcome to a typical day as a mum with triplet toddlers. It's nearly a year since I left my desk at Mirror HQ for a permanent position at a changing station. And it's been a blur of bottle-feeding, nappy-changing, dribble-dabbing and, of course, copious cuddling. Life as an instant mother-of-three has been harder, but happier, than I'd ever imagined. It's as exhausting

as it is exhilarating. And every day my hubby Michael and I feel lucky and proud to have three healthy, happy children. We are besotted. But it's not been a breeze. Hearing two babies wailing (stereo crying) isn't nice. And hearing three (surround-sound crying) sends stress levels stratospheric. Worse is when they all want a hug and I have to choose just one and let down two. Still, I'm so excited about Lily, Clara and Elise's first Christmas. And

a week after New Year we'll celebrate the girls' first birthday. Those two events mean serious shopping. I tried taking my wee elves into the Christmas stores, thinking they'd like the sight of so many twinkly lights. But I bumped the 6ft-long triple buggy into every festive display and paid out more on breakage fees than pressies.

Now, if it's not online it's not on my shopping list. Besides, taking my little girl gang out anywhere means strategic planning and major baggage. We have to phone ahead to restaurants to baggy three high chairs. And my changing bag is so big it should really have wheels. If we do make it out, we barely

walk a few steps without stopping. A quick dash to M&S takes 90 minutes because so many people queue to coo at my tiny trio. Most people are really nice, saying the sight of my babies has made their day. Others are brutally honest. "Triplets? I feel sorry for you. One's bad enough!" said one harassed mum, thoughtlessly, as the youngest grandchildren she loves more. Now she works harder and longer hours than she ever did

downright rude. One woman asked, while I was trying to spoonfeed all three, if I'd budge so her friend could get a better look at my little girls. I shot her a look so lethal she actually shuddered. But by far most people ask: "How do you cope?" I nod towards my mum, who retired early from a job she loved to help look after the youngest grandchildren she loves more. Now she works harder and longer hours than she ever did

- and never complains. Inadvertently, I seem to have helped a few other new mums, too. Some have told me when they're finding it hard to cope with their one child, they just think of me with three and soon cheer up. One heavily pregnant "friend" said: "I was feeling really fat and frumpy. But then I saw the picture of you pregnant and actually felt slim, ha ha!" Oh, cheers. And no matter how sick-stained

and sleep-deprived other mums are, I always look worse. When my sister whispered that I'd smudged my mascara I pointed out that the black rings under my eyes had more to do with Lily than Lancome. Yet the year since they were born - all under 5lb and fragile flowers - has been my happiest. Lily's first curl made me so chuffed I danced the hornpipe around the kitchen, even though it was flattened when I put her hat

on and hasn't bounced back yet. When Clara learned to crawl, I cried. And each time Elise waves, I feel as if she's won the Nobel Peace Prize. To top it off, their first words were "Mummy", right? Wrong. Lily's: "Dadda". Clara's: "Dad". And Elise's: "Daddy". Hmmp! I've a funny feeling Santa will bring them the three Tombliboos from In the Night Garden - a TV

show that hypnotises my girls, and husband, into a deep sleep. Of course, the only toys they really want are the ones their sisters have. And three-way tug-o-wars over toys are so vicious. Yet Lily, Clara and Elise already seem to love each other. They giggle together and reach out chubby little hands to one another. My Christmas will be chaos. And also the best ever. Because being a mum is all I've ever wanted.

Think of a number and triple it...our year's stats

- 4,494** bottle feeds
- 5,586** nappy changes
- 548** baths
- 520** packs of cotton wool buds
- 70** bibs
- 14** teeth between all three girls
- 5** daily loads of washing
- 4** steriliser kits - two disintegrated from over-use, one grilled in microwave mishap, one still on the go