



the DANGEROUS years

Smart boy,
that Bobby Driscoll.
He's solved the
problem of the
"awkward age"



Bobby's sprouted some since he appeared in *Song of the South* six long years ago



In *Peter Pan* Bobby is the voice of the pixie lad shown urging Wendy to fly away

BY BARBARA BERTH JAMISON

Seeing Bobby Driscoll soar to stardom as the wonderful adolescent in *The Happy Time*, it certainly looks as though he has it all, doesn't it? Ten years of solid movie experience behind him, an Academy Award, travel, friendship with fine and important people—and now a big hit as a juvenile in one of the top pictures of the year.

Yet, Bobby, today, is facing the same adolescent adjustments as any other 15-year-old, only multiplied a thousand-fold. He not only has the braces on his teeth, the acne and the chafing under a rigid parental curfew on date nights, but he has also the worry of keeping his career going while all this is going on, a not inconsiderable load. How he is handling his personal adjustment and his career problem is a real tribute to his own healthy personality, as well as to his parents' guidance. Together, they're doing a hang-up job.

First of all, Bobby is confining his public appearances almost exclusively to radio and television. "At least until I grow a little more and can start playing young leads," he adds. Bobby is 5 feet 6 at this point, and he's career-wise enough to know that, aside from a dream role like his in *The Happy Time*, he'll have to stretch a bit before he can start smooching with the Debbies, Reynolds and Paget.

Luck, also, is playing a major part in Bobby's painful growing-up process. Walt Disney, to whom Bobby was under contract for seven fruitful years (*So Dear to My Heart*, *Song of the South*, *Treasure Island*), finally decided to make his long-planned animated *Peter Pan*—and while Bobby isn't actually in it, he's the all-important voice of Peter. "Another good way to keep active professionally, right now," Bobby says.

For the *Peter Pan* break, Bobby submitted to voice lessons—the only acting or vocal training he's ever had. His is a natural talent; his whole career, in fact, is a phenomenon. Discovered by a barber in Altadena, when he was 3 years old, he was introduced to the barber's cousin, who happened to be an actor. He, in turn, brought Bobby to the attention of his agent. Bobby, a lively outgoing youngster—"But not really a beautiful child," his mother puts in—was then tested for a bit in *Lost Angel*, the Margaret O'Brien starrer, and out of 500 children he got the part.

"To this day I can't understand how it happened," his mother goes on. "Bobby had never been trained for anything. There was no acting talent in the family, but there we were, with practically no effort on our part, with a movie star on our hands!" Let's add that out of all these kids, Bobby upon being shown (Please turn to page 84)

Bobby Driscoll

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a boat on the dry studio lot, was the only one of the mob to ask where the water was! Intelligence, then, not curls or a fake smile, was Bobby's ticket to fame.

Even with a fabulous career in the making, Bobby, at his parents' insistence, was kept in public school all through the years. "We were determined to keep him normal, even at the expense of stardom," his father contributes. "Bobby's acting was like other kids taking violin lessons or tap dancing. A job—nothing more." And Bobby, today, in his over-sized unbuttoned plaid shirt, his tapered trousers, rolled up at the cuffs, and his sharp suede shoes, squirms as his folks can't help saying they think he turned out just fine.

Right now, he's in his second year at University High in Westwood, as normal and average a kid as you'll find anywhere. And how do his friends react to his being a celebrity? "Nobody ever mentions it," he grins gratefully. "Why should they?" He actually feels relieved that his pals have him off the hook, actorially speaking; kids this age could make him miserable about it!

He has scads of friends, male and female,

and his off-screen behavior is just about the same as yours and yours—or that cute boy's across the street who's senior cheer-leader. He even used to be an all-A student. "Now I'm just average," he admits. "To get an A you have to put in four hours of homework every night." He stretches out his legs—"Who's got that kind of time?" Especially with radio receiving sets to listen to, parties to give and attend, hot-rod races to watch and, umm, girls. "I've already gone steady twice," says our under-age Romeo, who doesn't shave yet. "Right now, though, it's all the girls for me."

He's preparing—in and around his teenage activities and his professional work—to go to Occidental, his church's college, when the time comes, and his mother adds meaningfully, "If he makes the grades." To make sure he does, he has to be in by 10 o'clock school-nights, midnight on week ends. How does Bobby like this strict supervision? "It's okay, I guess," he mutters. "Mom and Dad are pretty fair."

And there you have it: the care and raising of a typical American boy, who also happens to be a movie star, and how he's getting through the "dangerous years," professionally and personally. From where we sit, it looks like Bobby will waltz grandly through both fields.

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