



HMM... I WANT  
A GUY WHO...

THE FIRST  
MINUTE CAN  
BE NERVE-  
WRACKING

EAGERLY  
AWAITING MY  
NEXT DATE

PRAYING FOR A  
LOVE MATCH?

MEETING AND  
GREETING...

THE  
CLOCK'S  
TICKING,  
GUYS!

# Speedy Dating

LOVE IN THREE MINUTES OR LESS

Are Timed Mini Dates The Matchmaking Method Of The Future?  
CW Puts Quickie Coupling To The Test...

By Erin Brereton

The benefits of finding true love are enormous—unconditional support, endless affection, intense adoration—but who has time for all that?

I keep myself busy at work. I have friends who I rarely see. I have piles and piles of laundry! Clearly, I've run out of time in my day to go scouring the local bar scene for suitable mates. It's not that I'm not looking for love—it's that I don't want to look for long. It's like shopping. If I want a denim jacket, I want to find one I like, fast. Does that mean I have to compromise price or style? No. It just means I have to limit my shopping to a place that offers a good selection of jackets.

And when I want to slip my arms around a hot guy (as opposed to some neatly crafted denim), I want the same opportunity. Which has brought me here, to FastDater, to try one of the latest singles crazes—speedy dating. It's the fast and the furious of romance—singles rev up their engines and try to charm, charm, charm for three minutes before the person they are talking to moves on. Then you try again. And again. And again...

## TWOSOME TIME

I've certainly been on dates that I had wished would last for only three minutes, but this is my first actual experience doing the timed-encounter thing. I'd heard about it—parties held in bars or function centers promising 20 to 40 dates a night—but so far, I'd been doing just the conventional dinner-and-a-movie thing (a cumbersome three

hours or more).

When I arrive at Joe's, a Chicago bar located at 940 Wood Street that hosts a FastDater event every Monday night, the party room is empty except for the neat rows of tables, each bearing a flickering candle and a box of breath mints (all the ingredients you need for a date—no matter how long it lasts, really). About 45 minutes before the event starts, people start filing in to the room...checking each other out as they sign in, striking up conversations about why they decided to come. On my trek back from the bathroom I hear three women say, "I just figured, 'Why not?'" And really, why not?

"People say, 'Well, I can just go to a bar to meet someone,' but no, you really can't," says FastDater Founder Lisa Lombardi. "Everyone is here to meet people—it's completely targeted." That's why Lombardi, a busy marketing exec, started FastDater: She

wanted to create a way to simplify (and streamline) dating.

Here's how the FastDater system works: You sign up via the Internet (there's also a phone number to call if you're not yet a motorist on the Information Superhighway), plunk down a \$35 entry fee and show up at least 15 minutes before the event to register. Upon arriving, you get a nametag that is also marked with a number—this is your identity for the next three hours. Then, when the party starts, the members of whichever gender are picked to move from table to table (on this night, it was guys) are assigned a starting point, where they begin date No. 1. After three minutes, a buzzer bell rings, you mark down a simple "yes" or "no" on a score sheet and say hello to your next date.

## SYNCHRONIZE YOUR WATCHES...

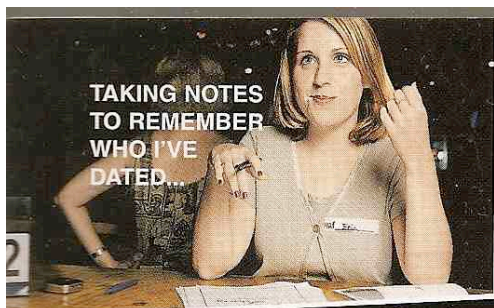
The buzzer rings and...we're off! Only not me. Because of a slight imbalance in gender numbers (there are a few more women present tonight), I am sitting alone during the first rotation. So far, FastDating feels like high school.

I listen to the chatter of the new couples surrounding me...introducing themselves, shaking hands, asking each other where they're from and then listening intently. Will it be difficult to strike up a conversation with a stranger? Who will start talking? What will they say? I am totally weirded out.

And hungry. I decide my first three-minute date will be with the bowl of popcorn that's been placed on everyone's table. And if I dare say, I think there was some potential there.







TAKING NOTES TO REMEMBER WHO I'VE DATED...



I'D GIVE THIS GUY THREE MORE MINUTES!



SORRY! WE'RE OUT OF TIME!



ANOTHER QUICK ENCOUNTER...



HE'S ABLE TO BE FUNNY IN THREE MINUTES?



...HE'S A KEEPER!

Photography by Alberto Lopez.

### TIME FLIES

With the second hum of the buzzer, I do get a date: And it's nowhere as weird as I think. You shake hands, you introduce yourselves, and you just start talking: Not bad. I can do that. We chat about Chicago, and our jobs.

After three minutes, the buzzer beeps, and we're both surprised. "Oh! It's such a short time!" I exclaim, for the first of 950 times that night. Because it really does go fast, in most instances. The unfortunate thing is it takes some people a few minutes to warm up—and a few minutes is all we have. Take for instance Shy Guy, who was quiet and withdrawn for the first two and a half minutes, then began to relax and laugh—a sound that was completely drowned out by the buzzer.

### TOO MUCH INFORMATION

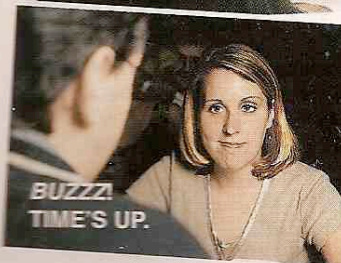
Within the next hour I meet the following date prospects: the dean of a local college, a professional violinist and a very nice salesman. I have also met a man who wants two children, preferably within the next three years; a man who has an affinity for really bad lines and a man whose main hobby is breeding giant snakes. Lesson No. 1 of speedy dating: Don't lay too much on the line in three minutes. And lest you think it was just the men who put it all out there and then wished they could take it right back, I became stuck in a two and a half-minute

attempt to prove I was not completely dorky after responding to a dater's initial question of, "So what do you do for fun?" with "I really want a cat!"

The other thing I'd recommend is *not* using cheesy lines to try to impress the other person. Nothing freezes a conversation faster than a doozer like, "Well, I'm really enjoying your eyes right now..." I had that



"HELLO, I'M ERIN..."



BUZZ! TIME'S UP.

little nugget tossed at me about a minute into a date, and I couldn't think of any other response than "Thank you, they came with my head," which was just as weird, and the rapport pretty much stopped there. I hope he did indeed like my eyes, because he had nothing to do for the next two minutes but stare at them in near silence.

But most of the guys are there for the same reason I am: They're sick of the traditional dating scene (crowded bars, bad blind dates). It's nice to be in a room of people who all want to meet someone. And there are some contenders: The very nice classical musician who loves Chicago; an administrator who has a great smile and great conversation. In fact, it's extremely clear when the buzzer goes off if there's future date potential or not—you find yourself wishing some guys could stay and keep chatting!

### TIME TO GO...

After more than three hours, the dates come to a close. The verdict? For the semi-shy gal, speedy dating is a great thing. And for girls like me, who may be chatty but have no clue how to get their game on, it's a gift: Somebody else brings the men; we just have to talk. And then? Fill out your sheet (I checked off "yes" for several men, if you were wondering), hand it in and go home.

Two days after the dating event, I get an e-mail from FastDater with my matches. Twenty-two fellas marked me down as a yes (these are so much better than the odds I get when I go to bars). The day after that message arrives, I get three e-mails from guys who would actually like to chat for 60 minutes or more. Two are nice invitations for coffee and conversation; the other ends with "gotta go get horizontal" and I delete it.

Will I actually ever go on a date with any of my three-minute suitors? I'd really like to. We've been e-mailing, but the thing that drew many of us to FastDater may be the biggest obstacle to planning our next date: time. Trying to coordinate our schedules for a date that would last 60, maybe 90—or more—minutes is turning out to be a difficult thing. Sure, we may not have time on our side, but we've already conquered the hardest part of dating—meeting someone. As for the evening out? Only time will tell... **CW**

### LOOKING FOR A QUICK MATCH?

Check out [www.fastdater.com](http://www.fastdater.com) for a list of upcoming speedy dating events near you!

## FINDING LOVE FAST

We Spent 21 Minutes Talking With Tom Jaffee, CEO And Founder Of 8minute Dating

When Tom Jaffee started 8minute Dating, he had no problem settling on a basic concept or location (Boston, where he lives), but he did have one quandary: How long to make the timed dates? Whereas many groups opt for seven minutes, Jaffee's is one of the few to push the time limit *up*—to a whopping eight minutes.

### What can we expect from that additional minute?

The way I look at it is you want to have an amount of time when you can sit down and have a conversation with somebody. With eight minutes you get a sense of "Is this somebody I would enjoy spending a whole evening with?"

### If there's silence during the eight-minute date is that bad?

If you're talking to anyone for eight minutes, and it's hard, it's not going to be a good evening out later.

### Do a lot of love matches result from your parties?

More than 90 percent of people who go to our events meet somebody they want to see again. About 65 percent of the time the interest is mutual. If you compare that to any other way single people try to meet each other, nothing else comes close!

### Why do you think this is such a hit?

People have asked me if I think it's just a trend and I don't. It's about meeting people and having conversation.