

'Dumb as a stick'

Clueless Jessica Simpson TV's new guilty pleasure

By MICHAEL GILTZ

NEWLYWEDS — the MTV show that follows pop stars Jessica Simpson and Nick Lachey of 98 Degrees around for their first year of marriage — is turning into the kind of TV hit that could give album sales a real boost (hers just hit the Top 10 and his came out yesterday).

But is the price too high?

Simpson is in danger of becoming a much sexier, teen-idol version of the clueless Ozzy Osbourne.

The ratings are big.

Billboard's senior writer Carla Hay thought the show would be lucky to get 1 million viewers. In fact, it debuted with 2.48 million viewers and won its timeslot.

Those numbers have held up. "Newlyweds" (Tuesday nights at 10:30 on MTV) had more young viewers than "Making the Band," "The Osbournes" and everything else on basic cable except wrestling, MTV specials like the Video Music Awards and stalwart "The Real World."

But what has everyone talking is Jessica Simpson herself. She's been described by reviewers as

a brat, embarrassingly babyish and — when people want to be kind — charmingly clueless.

"She is dumb as a stick," said Alisha, a 31-year-old graphic designer too embarrassed about being a fan of the show to give her last name.

"Jessica is totally watchable, like Ozzy Osbourne. She's not a train wreck like Anna Nicole.

"You can tell Nick is annoyed by her, but she's totally sexy so he puts up with it.

"I felt amused watching Ozzy. I felt dirty watching Anna Nicole. And I feel pity watching Jessica.

"She's the show. I'm not sure she knows she's the show, but she is."

It's hard not to be fascinated by a pop princess who would rather buy new clothes than do laundry, wonders if her tuna fish is really tuna because it's called Chicken of the Sea ("a blonde moment" Simpson has said about that comment), goes camping with her Louis Vuitton bag and belches more than John Belushi in "Animal House."

Paula, another fan, can't decide what her favorite stupid-Jessica moment is.

"It's kind of like repulsive yet intriguing," said Paula. "Every single word out of her mouth, you think, 'Who could be stupider?'"

News reports already say the show has been optioned for a second season, something the stars were both up for.

"Well, it was really more fun than we anticipated," said Lachey in an interview right before the show debuted.

"So if the situation was right, we might do it again." MTV says no decision has been made.

"It would be perfect as long as season two is 'Marriage, Marriage' and season three is 'Le Divorce,'" said Paula. "Though God help us if they ever have a kid."

But will the marriage last that long?

"In five years, they'll break up," Alisha predicted.

"He'll cheat on her and she'll be jealous and they'll break up and get back together a thousand times before finally ending it.

"There's nothing wrong with them; they're just too young."



Nick Lachey and Jessica Simpson, stars of MTV's reality hit "Newlyweds," arouse a sense of superiority in viewers.