

By Nick McGrath

SHE HAS large hips, needs a nose job and can't find A BOYFRIEND, apparently. Which all goes to show that beauty must be in the eye of the beholder because, extraordinarily, this is what Vanessa Ponce de León says about herself.

"I would say I'm averagely beautiful. Miss Panama last year was the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life whereas I'm just like any other woman in the world."

Not quite Vanessa – you are Miss World after all. Until tonight that is when the title she has held for a year will be handed to another beauty.

But 12 months wearing the crown has clearly not gone to Vanessa's head. In fact the former model from Mexico is disarmingly modest. "Sometimes I put on some trousers and I'm like, 'I wish I didn't have such wide hips so this could fit perfectly.' I have Latina hips, which makes a very nice hour-glass body but when I was a model I was rewarded for being thin."

"When I won Miss Mexico, I remember people were telling me I needed to get a nose job," says Vanessa, before adding that she would never have cosmetic surgery. "I wouldn't want to change anything on my body now. I know myself and I value myself and I just love the way I am. I love the way God made me."

Vanessa, 27, says that all women, no matter how stunning, have insecurities.

"I've been a model for a long time and I know many beautiful girls who don't even know it and see it as a curse and they don't like it."

"Even though they're perfect, they think there's something wrong with them, and it's a huge complex that all women have. I haven't seen a woman in the world who doesn't have any kind of insecurities about some part of their body and for me it's my hips."

Vanessa admits that her looks have rendered some men speechless.

"I was once talking to a very high-ranking authority figure – I'm not going to say who – and he suddenly said to me, 'Sorry, can you just repeat that all over again because I was just staring at you and I couldn't focus on what you said', which I'm not offended by. I'll take that as a compliment as I'm very patient but I think perhaps people are reacting more to the title than the way I look."

But despite this, Vanessa says she gets just as tongue-tied. "I'm terrible at dating. As soon as I like someone I

get scared and I just go like, 'Blah-blah-blah.' I am intimidated very easily by people I like."

"I'm very socially open but I'm very bad at talking to men that I am interested in. I don't do internet dating but probably once I give my crown back I'll start dating again."

Thanks to none other than the Good Morning Britain host, Piers Morgan, with whom Vanessa initially clashed on air when she appeared on the show but has since struck up an unlikely friendship, she has her sights set firmly on a British boyfriend.

"Piers is a very good ambassador for British men. I've never dated a British guy but I really like British guys because they're very polite; very courteous. I like the way they interact with women. It's not as sexual as in Mexico. In South America generally women get harassed in the streets and in Mexico I would never wear a skirt. If I did, I'd be yelled at but in the UK I feel quite safe."

Since clashing with Morgan, Vanessa is friends with the 54-year-old anchor's wife Celia Walden, and even spent a day learning how to play cricket with the outspoken presenter. She will come face-to-face with Piers again tonight when he takes up his role as one of the judges in this year's final at London's Excel Centre.

Vanessa says the modern Miss World show is a far cry from the pageant – the world's oldest running – as created by Eric Morley in 1951. Since his death in 2000, Morley's widow, Julia, has co-chaired the event.

"Miss World is not a beauty pageant and I don't think beauty pageants have a place in our society any more," says Vanessa, an international business graduate. "It's a celebration of womanhood and the people who accuse it of being an outdated, sexist institution don't understand it."

"We don't have a bikini round. We don't have an evening gown round and there's no part where the girls walk down the runway and some judge says, 'Oh, this girl is chubby.'"

"We're not judged on how we look. We're judged on our projects, our sports, our talents," says five foot nine Vanessa, who was crowned the 68th Miss World at the Sanya City Arena in China 12 months ago, triumphing over 117 rival contestants from all over the world. "The girls are so smart. They have degrees, some of them speak six languages and there is so much more that women can offer than their looks. This position has not objectified me in any way," says



BEAUTY WITH BRAINS: Visiting Oxford Union



GROWING UP: As a child in Mexico City



ANGLOPHILE: Visiting London's Tower Bridge

'I'm just like any other woman – I'm pretty average...'

So says the charmingly self-effacing reigning Miss World as she prepares to hand over to her successor tonight



Pictures: HEX, GETTY

WINNING WAVE: Vanessa is an international business graduate



GREAT FRIENDS: Vanessa with breakfast TV host Piers Morgan

Vanessa, who is on the board of directors of a rehab centre for vulnerable young girls in her hometown of Mexico City and volunteers with indigenous communities and disabled charities.

"Being Miss World has empowered me. I know what I want and what I have to do to change my environment and to make it better."

But before relinquishing her crown, Vanessa has been making the most of her time in Britain and now considers herself to be a passionate Anglophile.

"I love Britain," she says. "I love all things British. I love going shopping in Fortnum & Mason's. I love Sunday roasts and I'm a big fan of British pubs too." And as one of the planet's premier crown

wearers, Vanessa is also a big fan of the Queen.

"I really love the monarchy. I love what they stand for and I love what they represent. I love that they care about the people. I love that they get close to the people and every year they get more human and less goddessy, like with Meghan now. I think her relationship with Harry is beautiful."

"And I have the biggest respect for the Queen. She has been doing it for so long and she does it with such ease."

"It is very hard to be the centre of attention of the whole country and carry that weight."

And Vanessa, who qualified for the Miss World contest after originally winning the South

American reality show Mexico's Next Top Model in 2014, was also glued to this year's big UK reality show Love Island.

But don't expect to see Vanessa, who has just come out of a seven-year relationship and is currently single, appearing on TV.

"No way. I value my private life too much to expose it like that and I've been so busy with Miss World I've not really been emotionally available or ready to feel that spark again with someone."

● The 69th Miss World is being broadcast today on London Live between 2pm-5pm. Coverage is also available on Sky Channel 117, Virgin Media Channel 159 and Freeview Channel 8