



A radiant Julia poses proudly with her gorgeous non-identical twin girls, Zena (left) and Xanthe, born on 12 March. The 44-year-old former *Countryfile* presenter endured the physical and emotional upheaval of five rounds of IVF before the twins were conceived. Now she and partner Gerard are enjoying the happy ending: "My dream come true," she says

EXCLUSIVE FIRST PHOTOS OF HER 'CHICKS' JULIA BRADBURY TALKS PYJAMA DAYS AND LATE PARENTHOOD AS SHE PRESENTS HER MIRACLE TWINS

'The moment I felt the deepest joy was when both babies were on my chest and I thought, "They've made it!"'

Whenever Julia Bradbury used to think about what life would be like after her twins were born, she imagined happy chaos.

However, the scene that greets **HELLO!** when we arrive for our exclusive photoshoot with the TV presenter at her West London home is one of organised calm.

Her non-identical twin baby girls, Xanthe and Zena, lie on a blanket in the garden, kicking their tiny legs while big brother Zephyr nuzzles them with a toy bunny.

"Look at those chunky chins," says Julia, 44, cooing over the "gurgles", as she calls them. Even at five weeks, they look different – one fair and blue-eyed, the other olive-skinned with dark hair. Their mother, meanwhile, doesn't seem like a woman who has recently endured a multiple birth, displaying the sort of energy best described as irrepresible as she talks 19 to the dozen, beaming broadly and laughing loudly.

Not bad for someone who's caught up in an endless cycle of

feeding two hungry newborns every four hours for an hour at a time while attending to the needs of her boisterous three-and-a-half-year-old son. But after an arduous time that included the physical and emotional upheaval of five rounds of IVF, she and partner Gerard Cunningham are enjoying the happy ending. The fact she has daughters – not what she was expecting at all – has made their arrival all the more special.

"It's my dream come true and I feel incredibly lucky," she says. "I still

pinch myself and think, 'I'm a mother of three.' All the effort, everything we went through as a family, is more than worth it."

The twins, who were given Greek names like their brother as a nod to Julia's heritage (her mother is Greek), already have distinctive personalities as well as looks.

"Xanthe [which means "Golden one"] is much more chilled," says Julia. "She contemplates things and seems to take in everything around her. Whereas we already ▶





Big brother Zephyr keeps the twins amused with a toy bunny (above) and, while Mum holds Zena's head, gently kisses one of his sleeping beauties (below). The three-year-old has been "fantastic" with his new sisters, says Julia. "It's all very exciting," she adds



(LEFT) ZEPHYR'S JACKET: PETIT BATEAU. (ABOVE) ZEPHYR'S SHIRT: BRORA

call Zena [which means "Hospitable lady"] the angry man. She's a bit 'Grrr' and antsy. She's the fighter."

With an army of support – including aunts, Zephyr's former nanny Gemma (now a family friend, back to help with the babies' sleep routine) and her devoted parents Michael and Chrissi on hand – Julia acknowledges how lucky she is but the ex-*Countryfile* presenter is only just returning to her former energy levels. The other night she slept for a full four hours – the longest in months – and only left the house for the first time the other day.

"I made it to the builders' merchants to buy a door latch," she laughs. "I was like, 'Whoaaa! Crazy!'" She got dressed when she left the hospital but since then, "Who knows?" she says breezily. "There are lots of pyjama days."

She's expressing milk to allow others, including 56-year-old Gerry, as she calls her partner, to feed the girls, although there's little dignity in the process. They are going through a massive growth spurt so the demand for milk is constant. "I'm like the dairy herd cow – someone from *Countryfile* should be reporting on me," she jokes.

"I wear this fantastic thing like a boob tube with slits in so you can put your breast pump on. I walk around the house with these funnels hanging off. There's no glamour."

The upside is that she's burning up calories and is now mobile enough to walk up and down the stairs for exercise. In the final weeks of her pregnancy, she was marooned on the sofa with an uncomfortable pelvis, feeling and looking "huge". "I

didn't have cankles, I had fankles," she jokes about her swollen legs.

The babies' arrival didn't go as smoothly as Julia had hoped. She had made plans for a natural birth but, as D-Day drew closer, Zena flipped the wrong way round and became breached.

Julia's consultant at Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital in London advised a Caesarean for the babies' safety and booked the operation for when the pregnancy reached 37 weeks, which is when twins are considered full term.

However, Zena, who kept flipping backwards and forwards, returned to a normal position on the morning of the operation, 12 March. "The doctor looked surprised and said, 'We're back on for a natural birth,' and recommended the labour be induced. For him, it was the day they needed to come out, by hook or by crook, so that's what we did."

HAPPINESS – AND CONCERN

Forty-five minutes after being induced, Julia's contractions started. Just over nine hours later – and following an epidural, which she had been advised to have – Xanthe, the eldest but smallest twin, arrived.

"I was joyous from the moment Xanthe was born," says Julia, who was joined in the delivery room by Gerry, her mother Chrissi, sister Gina and Gerry's niece Bernie, who was her birthing partner with Zephyr. "I held her first then she was put on my chest and started to cry and I cried tears of happiness."

Then the mood changed. The room filled with doctors and "it all got a little hairy". Julia was

'I had a beautiful moment thinking, "I don't believe I've got two girls." I thought I'd end up with three boys'



Little angels: Holding her healthy twins was a moment of elation for Julia after a difficult birth. Xanthe, the eldest but smallest of the two, arrived first but with Zena, Julia was losing a lot of blood and the baby's heart rate had started to go up. "By the time she came out I was very emotional," she says



(LEFT) JULIA'S JUMPER: MURIEE. TROUSERS: NEW LOOK. NECKLACE: STORM. DOUBLE RING: JB BY JOUBI



Twice as nice: Julia with her "gurgles" in their nursery (above) with its heavenly ceiling (below). She says her daughters – who, like their brother, have Greek names as a nod to Julia's Greek mother – already have distinctive personalities. "Xanthe is much more chilled whereas Zena is a bit 'Grrr' and antsy. She's the fighter"



losing a lot of blood, Zena's heart rate had started to go up and it became a matter of urgency to get her out as quickly as possible.

"I said to the doctor, 'Tell me what I need to know.' He said, 'You just need to push.' For any mums out there who have had twins, hats off to you. Pushing one baby out is one thing, as you are completely spent. I thought, 'I don't think I can do it again,' but I had to. If I couldn't push I would have to have a C-section after going through hours of labour trying to avoid it.

"I was quite befuddled by all the drugs – gas, air, epidural – and I'd been going for 11 hours so it was all a bit blurry. But it was so to focus and when he said push, I did it.

"By the time she came out I was very emotional. My first thought was, 'Is she okay?' They popped her on my chest and she started to cry and everybody cried.

"Then Gerry brought Xanthe over and I had this beautiful moment thinking, 'I've got two girls. I don't believe it.' We weren't expecting another girl. I don't



know why but I thought I'd end up with three boys."

Holding both her healthy babies was a moment of elation and relief at the end of a long, often painful process. "After all the complications and everything we'd been through, they were both safe," she says.

"I had been very happy throughout the pregnancy but there was always this cautionary shadow on my shoulder that something could go wrong. You don't take anything for granted – the five rounds of IVF, the heartaches and failures along the way and making it through the pregnancy. So the moment I felt the deepest joy was when they were both on my chest and I thought, 'They've made it.'"

Both babies weighed over 6lb – a healthy weight for twins – and, despite having lost two litres of blood, Julia felt ready to leave after just one night in hospital.

Zephyr, who'd been excited about the "chicks", as he called them, throughout Julia's pregnancy, accepted his siblings immediately. "He's been fantastic," says his proud mum. "Having two sisters is the best thing for him as

'When we were all home, I was like, "Oh, there's one. Oh, there's another one." I didn't know which one to look at. It's miraculous'

there might have been more competition from another boy. He's the big brother now.

"The only time you know he's feeling like he's missing out is when I'm feeding. He wants to sit on my lap and be winded. But it's a busy house and there are enough people around so he hasn't missed out on attention."

It was only once she got home that the "shock and wonderment" of having twins hit. "Going from one to three is a big jump," she says. "The next day, when we were all home, I was like, 'Oh, there's one. Oh, there's another one.' I didn't know which one to look at. It's miraculous."

The arrival of twins also brings "a new level of excitement", says Julia, who has been overwhelmed by the kindness of friends, neighbours and

strangers, who have sent booties and cardigans from around the country.

SAY A LITTLE PRAYER

The only sadness overshadowing their arrival was the death of Gerry's Irish Catholic mother Rose, at 93, just a month before they were born. "Every day she would pray for the twins and light candles for them," says Julia. "She was a mother of eight, a real matriarch, and Gerry was very close to her. Although she didn't see the girls, the prayers worked."

Gerry, who was working in Hong Kong on the day of our shoot, has taken time off from work here and there rather than paternity leave. "We've got a house to finish and he's got a business to run," shrugs Julia. They moved into their large home

just before Christmas and builders are still working on the final touches.

Having support on hand is, she readily admits, a huge bonus. Even so, her approach is typically no-nonsense and positive.

"You have to step up to be a parent – there are always different challenges. There's the challenge of taking care of them at the same time, the physical demands, but I don't think the concentration required for being a parent to twins is any different. I just have to be the best parent I can to all three of them, love them all the same, make sure they all feel that equal amount of attention. You can never imagine being able to love a child more than you do but you do. There's this bottomless pit."

Julia constantly reminds herself how lucky she is. After Zephyr was born, she and Gerry – who have known each other for 20 years and have been in a relationship for more than five years – knew they wanted another child. Their desire to give Zephyr a sibling, as well as the strong pull of her own longing to be a mum again, compelled Julia to embark on IVF until she



'My chicks have brought a new lease of life. It's all very exciting'

succeeded. As an older mother, she knew the odds were stacked against her and is determined not to take any of it for granted or allow herself to think: "What have I done?"

"I wanted this so badly. I might joke about waking up in the night or expressing milk but this is what I wanted more than anything in the world. The tough times will pass and there will be new experiences and you have to get on with it."

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

She has also given hope to other women going through the rigours of fertility treatment. "The advice I give is, 'Try and stay as positive and happy as possible and realise there will be good days and bad.'"

Julia feels she's too "happy in the fog of early babies" to think too much about work, though she'll return in September for a new walking series, which will take her around the country. The remaining four episodes of her series for ITV, *The Wonder of Britain*, will also be screened later in the year.

"I'm a working mum and my career is very important, it's very much part of my make-up and who I am.

"As an older woman there are challenges but the advantage of being older on TV is that you've amassed a quantity of contacts so there are always ideas buzzing around and people you can talk to.

"Now I have two little girls, I feel I have a responsibility to show them they've got to be independent, self-sufficient, fend for themselves and forge their own path."

Until September, Julia's horizons are fixed on the home front.

"The chicks have brought a new lease of life," she says. "We have two new children and the next 20 years are going to be full on. It's all very exciting." **H**

INTERVIEW: ROSALIND POWELL
PHOTOS: DAVID VENNI

STYLING: GAYLE RINKOFF AT CAROL HAYES MANAGEMENT
HAIR & MAKE-UP: FABIO GOMES AT SLR AGENCY USING BUMBLE & BUMBLE & GIORGIO

(LEFT) JUMPER: MURIEE. TROUSERS: GAT RIMON. WEDGES: RUSSELL & BROMLEY. NECKLACE: OAK. RING: JB BY JOUBI

Cradling her precious daughters in the garden of her West London home, Julia couldn't look happier. She feels she's too "happy in the fog of early babies" to think too much about work, though she'll be returning in September for a new TV walking series. For now her horizons are fixed firmly on the home front. "I feel incredibly lucky," she says

