Samantha Rea charts the rise of the new relationship milestone that signals you’re serious

I would class myself as a self-assured woman, with a relaxed attitude to life. But, for three months, I checked Happn daily to see if my boyfriend was on there.

Paranoid? Worried he’s cheating? A woman driven mad by the terrifying nature of dating in the age of apps? No – I was hamstrung by the latest dating milestone, ‘The Big Delete’. Forget meeting the parents or leaving a toothbrush, *this* is the make-or-break moment for Relationships v2.0.18. It’s the new ‘the chat’, where you both agree to delete your dating apps, for better or worse.

It was my own situation that made me realise this had become the big moment that defines modern relationships. I met my current boyfriend on Happn and, on our third date, after he gave me a map of Berlin (a thoughtful gift for a trip I was about to go on), it just slipped out. ‘You’re lovely!’ I said. ‘But... are you lovely to everyone?’ I’ve noticed you’re on the app every day.’ While I panicked I sounded like I was stalking him, he reasonably replied, ‘That must be my settings – I’ll adjust them.’ Two negronis in, I took my opportunity and suggested we both come off it entirely – and he agreed.

Except, I checked, and he hadn’t, so I didn’t either. And I kept checking. Every day I realised he hadn’t, I considered calling it off. While I was too embarrassed to bring it up again, our IRL relationship actually bloomed. I went to his sister’s wedding, a family holiday and a barbecue thrown by his boss. Still his profile remained online. Three months of painfully treading the line between being scared to rock the boat and wondering what the hell was going on, I snapped on a drive to the Cotswolds. It emerged he’d deleted the app off his phone, but hadn’t deactivated it beforehand, so it looked like he was still available.

I trusted him – and believed him because, I remembered, I’d actually done the same thing when I was dating someone else previously. But the fact is, the confusion around our Big Delete had nearly ended things – and left me doubting myself for months. And I’m not alone. With 37% of couples meeting on a dating app, and 45% of people using one at some point, this scenario is happening all around me. One friend was really happily dating a new guy for six weeks, but they hadn’t had ‘the chat’. So, not wanting to be presumptuous, she kept the apps on her phone, but didn’t use them. When an alert popped up on her phone during a date, her new man was devastated, assuming she was seeing other people. Another friend was newly back on the scene, so when she met a guy she liked, didn’t think to ask him if they were both ‘off app’ – he wasn’t, as she discovered only when his Tinder profile showed up on another friend’s phone.

So before packing your toothbrush or letting them meet the real drunken you, consider the Big Delete, the real hurdle most modern relationships now have to clear.

The Big Delete Guidelines

**Relationship expert Jo Hemmings runs through the potential pitfalls**

**Beware the seed spreader**

You matched on Tinder – and you know he’s deleted it – but what about all the other dating apps? Jo suggests casually asking early on about other apps people have used. If someone lists the lot, log the info away for ‘the chat’.

**Remember to bring up apps when real-life Romeos strike**

You met the old-fashioned way, offline. But it doesn’t mean they’re app-less. ‘I had a client who met her boyfriend in a bar, then two months later, her friends saw him on an app,’ says Jo. ‘When you meet IRL it might not cross your mind to talk about apps, but you’ve still got to be tactical.’

**Don’t assume anything**

You met online and so far everything is going well, but don’t assume anything. ‘Women tend to think it’s exclusive once you’re sleeping together – but guys often have a different approach,’ says Jo. It’s a reason to initiate that delete chat.

**The chat isn’t everything**

You’re not quite sure that he has deleted the app – you may have made a friend search for him, then found him, confronted him, and been met with some excuse about tech. Jo says the chat is helpful, but it is not a fix-all. ‘If you can’t trust him to come off the app, you’ve got to question your relationship,’ she says.