

Riding the hormonal rollercoaster

By ANDREW MEVISSEN

LIFE at "sweet 16" is not as romantic and carefree as the poets would have us imagine judging by the bitter-sweet experiences shared by five girls in an extraordinary new film tracking their rollercoaster ride into adulthood.

The acclaimed Canadian-made movie, *Talk 16*, charts a year in the lives of its real-life "stars" — Astra, Erin, Helen, Lina and Rhonda — as they navigate the treacherous straits of young adulthood with its bewildering world of B-girls, B-boys, browners, normals, thrashers and posses.

The latest instalment in the series of "reality dramas" to hit our big and small screens, *Talk 16* provides an intriguing insight into the increasingly com-



● Teenage angst ... (from left) Helen, Lina, Erin, Rhonda and Astra show life at 16 is serious business.

plicated life of a hormonally shaky 16-year-old, and has already been lauded around the world as an unprecedented document of today's young female generation.

Inspired by Britain's legendary *7 Up* and *35 Up* profile series, *Talk 16* condenses one year in the lives of each girl into 100

minutes of laughter, tears, agony and mayhem.

"I'm sweet 16 and quite sour," snaps hard-edged street kid Astra in the film. "Yeah, I'm a problem child — a real demon seed. I just can't stand rules."

Erin, in contrast a softly-spoken private-school girl, timidly tip-toes into the awesome world of adulthood: "What I hate

about growing up is the extra responsibility and independence ... I'd rather stay in childhood all my life."

But super confident Lina candidly shouts her teenage ambitions: "I want a car. Buy me a car. And I want a boyfriend and I want him now, now, now."

The brainchild of Canadian film producers Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell, this engrossing docu-drama follows the day-to-day lives of each girl from New Year's Eve, 1989, until December 22, 1990, and captures their private wars with anorexia, religion, friends, regimental parents, boys, sex, teachers and competing youth cultures.

For teenagers, *Talk 16* provides an enriching global mirror of growing up in the '90s while for adults, it evokes long-forgotten

memories of adolescence and offers a valuable communication link with the teenage "underclass".

Mitchell, 31, and Lundman, 40, explain the aim of the film was to "get in touch with the lost generation" and focus on the girls' fears and desires.

They suggest parents and teenage girls see the film together.

"We noticed that teenage girls with their completely foreign language were a world cut off from us, so we thought we would journey back into their world and give young women a voice," Mitchell says.

"Adolescence was a lot simpler in my time. Kids today are just bombarded with all this information about things like drugs and sex, and decisions are a lot more difficult to make.

"We learned the best way to deal with teenagers is to

listen to them and not impose value judgments on them."

Lundman adds: "The beauty of *Talk 16* is that for 100 minutes, parents can listen to what these kids have to say and it's a lot of fun at the same time."

The hit film, made on a shoestring budget of \$600,000, followed five months of interviewing more than 350 subject candidates from a variety of ethnic, racial and economic backgrounds.

The five girls chosen represent a cross-section of teenage personalities.

There is runaway Astra, the tough street-wise school drop-out and confessed "Satanist" who oscillates between drug-scoffing boyfriends and failed pregnancies.

She posed the biggest problem for the adventurous camera crew, which at

one point found itself kicked out of a McDonald's restaurant when Astra and her friends who were not welcome there.

Erin struggles with poor self-esteem and is scolded by her parents for being a quitter. She tries to shun the unwelcome intrusion of adult obligations and, in addition to her infinite troubles, learns she has cervical cancer.

Helen, a gifted and accomplished student and a devout Christ-