

NICOLE PUTS KEITH ON SHORT LEASH

She'll decide who he sees, where he goes

NICOLE KIDMAN has slapped troubled hubby Keith Urban with a stinging ultimatum: "Either your druggie friends go - or I do!"

That's the latest twist in the marriage of the Oscar-winning actress and her country superstar spouse, who entered rehab at the Betty Ford Center after relapsing in a booze and drug binge.

"Nicole is standing by Keith, but with one big proviso - he has to dump his drinking and drugging buddies," a friend told The ENQUIRER.

"Keith obviously didn't snap his fingers and magically make drugs appear during his last binge. Someone clearly sold them to him - and Nicole is holding firm to her zero-tolerance policy.

"While she knows she can't baby-sit Keith, she's establishing certain rules for the house, such as which friends can come around and which ones can't. She plans to keep Keith on a short leash."

Keith, 39, first underwent cocaine and alcohol addiction treatment in 1998. He relapsed and checked into Betty Ford on Oct. 19 - less than three months after marrying Nicole - after overdosing on cocaine and alcohol.

Nicole has been filming "The Golden Compass" in London, but has flown back to California almost every weekend to visit Keith at Betty Ford in Rancho Mirage.

As The ENQUIRER previously reported, the 39-year-old actress



is expecting her first child - and sources say she's determined to save her strained marriage by going into couple's counseling with Keith.

"Nicole loves Keith, but when it comes to his hard-partying pals, she's taking an 'either-they-go-or-I-go' stance," said the friend.

"It's tough love, but Keith has relapsed time and again - and she feels it is the only way to get through to him."

Keith - who recently won the Country Music Association Awards male vocalist of the year award for the third consecutive year - plans to stay at Betty Ford until he's beaten his booze and drug demons.

"Nicole is hoping her ultimatum will save Keith and their marriage," said the friend. "She believes they've already been through the worst with Keith's relapse. She's just praying it never happens again."

by ROBIN MIZRAHI