

## Q&A: Behind the wheel of *Top Gear* Series 27

*Top Gear* is back with a shiny new presenter line-up. Series 27 of the popular motoring show sees Chris Harris, joined by comedian, Paddy McGuinness and cricket legend, Andrew 'Freddie' Flintoff, with a little help from the Stig.

The new series which will be broadcast on Thursday, 29 August at 8pm on BBC Brit (DStv Channel 120) will see the presenters tackling the fastest, hottest, toughest challenges to date: pushing their cars, and themselves, to the very limits of endurance. All because no one takes testing cars as seriously as *Top Gear*.



Source: © Lee Brimble / BBC Studios

From the brutal heat of the Ethiopian desert to the sweltering Borneo rainforest, from the wilds of Iceland to the pedestrianised shopping district of downtown Mansfield, *Top Gear* is going bigger than ever before. It's all brought to you from the world-famous *Top Gear* test track, where a fresh batch of celebrities will demonstrate their driving prowess, or lack thereof, in the Reasonably Fast Car as well as being put through a new challenge which will be set by the presenters each week.

Executive producers, Clare Pizey and Alex Renton, tell us more about the upcoming season...

### ■ What can viewers expect from the new series of *Top Gear* and have you any favourite moments?

**Clare Pizey:** Viewers can expect some beautiful cars, some old cars, far-flung destinations, laughter, crashes, laughter, teasing, more laughter, Paddy way out of his comfort zone, even more laughter, Freddie actually being intimidated by a challenge, and Chris Harris driving in a very thick polo neck sweater in 40 degrees heat.

I think it's warm, funny, competitive, modern and hopefully surprising. I do hope that the viewers like it. I think it's certainly the best series of *Top Gear* I've been involved in.

My favourite moments always come when we are making big episodes. As always they start with the car and are ambitious with high production values. But the best footage always come from things we couldn't anticipate - Freddie and Chris helping Paddy to change a tyre – with Freddie in his underpants, Freddie singing (very well!), Chris Harris's face when he found out he was actually competing in Iceland's Formula Off-Road – when he thought he was just mentoring Freddie. Paddy's face when he saw the accommodation *Top Gear* crew stays in when we are in far-flung destinations – his love of discussing the relative merits of different kinds of food - and the look on his face when Fred offered him a live sago worm to eat. I could go on and on and on.

**Renton:** Series 27 is packed to the rafters with classic *Top Gear* ingredients. From power tests at our track in Dunsfold to foreign adventures in Ethiopia, Borneo, to daredevil challenges in Iceland. Add to this the new presenting dynamic of the fiercely competitive Freddie Flintoff, the quick-witted Paddy McGuinness and the petrol head's petrolhead Chris Harris and the show hit new levels of energy, excitement and entertainment.

With Harris, we have served up the newest and most potent track cars for him to wring the neck of. He takes the wheel of both McLaren's and Ferrari's most track focussed road cars to date and puts them head to head to find out which is best. He also tests out the latest from the Italian manufacturer Dallara and more! We really shouldn't be paying him for this, should we?

Away from the track, we take great pride as producers in parachuting the presenters into situations where they are way outside of their comfort zones. With Paddy, who by his own admission is not a well-travelled man, this was not difficult and so sending him into the wilds of Borneo as soon as he touched down and shook the ground controller's hand saying “Ello, I'm from Bolton” we knew we were in for a treat. Roll on two hours and he's stuck in the mud, with insects in his car and having to corral a truck full of locals to help push his rare French sports car up a hill. Welcome to *Top Gear*!

Fred has brought a totally fearless and highly competitive element to the show which has only encouraged the producers to push things further than ever before. Taking on the challenge, we sent him out to Iceland to compete in the Formula Offroad event. If you don't know it, it is 1,000 horsepower vehicles tasked with climbing vertical cliff faces and aquaplaning across lakes. Again, welcome to *Top Gear*!

Whether abroad or in the UK with all VTs the car is the star and whether we are building our own electric sports cars, or finding the ultimate family car, the car is at the epicentre of what we do.

### ■ ***What makes Freddie, Paddy and Chris stand out as individual presenters?***

**Pizey:** They're all brilliant but in very different ways. They all love cars, but in different ways. They're all really funny but in different ways.

Freddie appears to have had a fear bypass combined with a superhuman pain threshold. He's hugely well-travelled. He's hugely competitive. He's sickeningly good at absolutely everything he does. He loves cars. He's a good driver. Despite having the odd crash.

Paddy is a born showman. He's warm and he's funny. He talks to everyone wherever we go. He's a good driver. By his own admission, he's not well travelled. He's had a steep learning curve – from getting over his fear of flying, to unusual food, to working with extreme jetlag.

Chris is the Petrol Head's Petrol Head. His knowledge of cars is encyclopaedic. And he's a racing driver. So job well done. But he's much more than that. He's funny, competitive and only a bit grumpy sometimes. He's also the most disorganised person I've ever met and the least vain. He is baffled by the fact the Paddy and Freddie care about their clothes and what they look like. I honestly don't think Chris owns a mirror.

### ■ ***There's been a lot of talk about chemistry. What's it like?***

**Pizey:** I can honestly say it feels like they've known each other for years and years and years. Sometimes, in television people just click. And these three did exactly that.

### ■ ***Can you tell me about Freddie, Paddy and Chris' dynamic?***

**Renton:** They have hit the ground running. It is a triumvirate that has worked brilliantly from the very moment they all got together.

You have a very competitive and fearless sportsman who wants to win at all costs in Freddie. A brilliant performer who will disarm you with laughter and then thrash you in a race in Paddy and the ultimate petrolhead and racing driver in Chris.

What we get when they are all together is a whole load of mickey-taking, ruthless competition and huge amounts of laughter – and what ties them all together (and causes most of the friction) is a genuine love of the motorcar.

### ■ ***Which episodes stand out for you in this season?***

**Pizey:** Ethiopia – not just because it was a truly epic adventure, but also because I loved how much the presenters were affected by being in their first cars and also their amazement at discovering what a fabulous country Ethiopia is.

The presenters all built electric sports cars in one of the episodes – and because it's *Top Gear*, we set up a course based on Buzz Wire – if they went off the track they were given an electric shock (from a tens machine) and it was one of the funniest things I've ever filmed.

Chris Harris features on an episode about the history of the Lotus 79 Formula One car and actually gets to drive it. Only he could feature in this episode as he is a truly brilliant driver.

### ■ ***What was your personal highlight from making series 27?***

**Renton:** There are loads of standout moments in this new series, which is filled with challenges and laughter, but I would have to say that Ethiopia was a big highlight for me. Having worked on the show for the last 14 years, I am lucky to say that I have seen much of the world and Ethiopia was a true eye-opener.

It is the first episode that we will show in the new series and will be the first time that you will see the dynamic that exists

between the three presenters. They are in the first cars that they owned, and their reactions to these cars in this extraordinary landscape are amazing. Add to that, a blindfold challenge, a TG high-speed driving test in a quarry, a game of table football against the locals and a desperate attempt to keep their cars alive whilst driving through the hottest place on earth and we have a memorable series opener.

▣ ***What will continue to draw viewers to Top Gear for the new series?***

**Pizey:** Everything viewers tell us they love about *Top Gear* will still be there. Fabulous cars, some old cars, adventures and lots of laughter. The star in a reasonably fast car will still be there but with an additional element which we are excited about.

▣ ***What is it that still makes Top Gear so popular globally?***

**Renton:** The car is at the heart of every episode we make. It is something that everyone has a relationship with across the world and is integral to people's lives. It is where we spend a large amount of our time and is a part of our relationships that we have with our friends and family and the memories that we have about them.

*Top Gear* recognises that and is able to capture how it exists in its different forms across the whole spectrum of the automotive world. Whether it is extraordinary motorsports like the cliff climbing formula off-road in Iceland, or getting locals in Ethiopia to help us jack up an ordinary mark 2 escort, to keep it running on its 500-mile journey, they are all about relationships with the car. It is our job as producers to take what might seem like ordinary cars or car questions that people can relate to and put them in extraordinary situations.

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