



And on that Bombshell: Inside the Madness and Genius of Top Gear

Richard Porter

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I was *Top Gear*'s script editor for 13 years and all 22 series. I basically used to check spelling and think of stupid gags about The Stig. I also got to hang around with Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May. It didn't feel like something you should get paid for.

From the disastrous pilot show of 2002 to the sudden and unexpected ending in 2015, working on *Top Gear* was quite a rollercoaster ride. We crossed continents, we made space ships, we bobbed across the world's busiest shipping lane in a pick-up truck. We also got chased by an angry mob, repeatedly sparked fury in newspapers, and almost killed one of our presenters.

I realised that I had quite a few stories to tell from behind the scenes on the show. I remembered whose daft idea it was to get a dog. I recalled the willfully stupid way in which we decorated our horrible office. I had a sudden flashback to the time a Bolivian drug lord threatened to kill us. I decided I should write down some of these stories. So I have. I hope you like them.

And now, a quote from James May: 'Richard Porter has asked me to "write a quote" for his new book about the ancient history of *Top Gear*. But this is a ridiculous request. How can one "write a quote"? Surely, by definition, a quote must be extracted from a greater body of writing, for the purpose of illustrating or supporting a point in an unrelated work. I cannot "write a quote" any more than I could "film an out-take".

'Porter, like Athens, has lost his marbles.'

And on that Bombshell: Inside the Madness and Genius of Top Gear Details

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Jose Ramirez says

This was a good, light read. If you are a fan of Top Gear you will enjoy the stories that Porter shares. Some really interesting stuff about the formation of the show and behind the scenes things that went on. There was an interesting reveal about the Patagonia special and a guest they had lined up.

Porter is also pretty candid on his feelings regarding the incident with Clarkson assaulting Oisin Tymon that caused the end of the show. I feel like Porter could have shared a bit more about some of the classic episodes but this is a worthwhile read.

Lee Penney says

I, like many, was a fan of Top Gear. So a book that promises to take you “inside the madness and genius” of the programme was naturally of interest, especially if it was funny too (and how could it not be?).

The author was there before Andy Wilman took over as producer and the ‘new’ Top Gear was born, so has some insight into the whole affair from start to end. The chapters that largely flow chronologically through the series, but with the occasional step out to cover a specific topic (like The Stig, for example).

All well and good, punchy and amusing if not belly-laugh funny. I certainly had a few chuckles. What it lacked was a great deal of depth. You get the feeling the author didn’t want to reveal too much for fear of accusations he ‘sold out’ the family, although this may equally have been due to rushing to get this out while the headlines were still fresh.

The finish is a little brusque, we go from ‘all things swimming along’ to ‘a bad year’, to ‘it’s over, there’s not much to say.’ He then adds ‘by the way, I got a job on their new show.’

It does reaffirm what fans of the show hoped — that the three presenters are basically the same in real life and that the whole thing was as much fun to produce as it was to watch (if much harder work). It’s like discussing all your fondest memories of the show with more dedicated fan who has a better memory.

You forget how long the show ran for (22 series over 13 years!) and that it stumbled a bit in the early days (James May didn’t join until the second series). It became such a staple and changed car shows so much that you don’t remember what a revolution it was.

A good, if wistful, look back at the childish antics that often wrought entertainment gold.

Jake says

ambitious and not rubbish!

Beth says

If you loved Top Gear with Jeremy, Richard, and James, you will love this book about the show written by script editor Richard Porter. Each short chapter gives a behind the scenes description of a different aspect of making the show, stuff that enriches your favorite films and confirms that the presenters are as good as they seem on TV. There are stories of things never aired as well. I wish the book didn't end the way the show ended, but it is logical. Three sections contain dozens of photos.

Paul says

This would be my usual in depth style review but by the time Goodreads put it on here I'd read quite a few more books.

That said, I absolutely loved this book, for any fan of the show it's an essential read. It tells the reader how Top Gear used to be and how in its new format how it became the global phenomenon it was right up until the end. But it's also so much more, we get backstage stories, how The Stig came to be, the preparation that went into creating the challenges that became as much a staple of the show as car reviews as well as the pros and cons of working for the BBC.

There is so much more but words can't do it justice. I flew through this book in a matter of days and found it an utter joy. One of the best I've read this year.

Christopher Taylor says

This is the story of Top Gear's triumphant run where it became the most-watched show worldwide and the most popular car show of all time, rewriting what many of the rules and style of television in the process. It is written by the script editor Richard Porter, who worked with the three main hosts to build each show.

At times Porter waxes so Top Gear-comedy-writer that it's hard to read. Getting a zinger once in a while is funny, but non stop for several paragraphs in a row (or the entire intro and first chapter) gives no space for the funny to build or work, so it's just too much at a time. At other times it's so heartfelt (particularly the last two chapters) you almost feel embarrassed reading about the events.

That makes the book less of a breezy fun fest than one would expect given the writer and the topic, which is probably why I was able to pick the book up at the Dollar Tree for one whole buck.

Plus, he's kind of a jerk. What I mean is this: you know the parts of Top Gear where you go "why would anyone do that to their friend???" or the episode where they painted their cars outrageous and insulting provocative slurs and drove through the deep south to show how bigoted and awful Americans are? That's him all the way through. He thinks being an a-hole is funny, that you backstab to show affection, that being mean, degrading, and insulting is high comedy. And it shows in his writing.

Yes, he's self-deprecating, but never in a way that feels honest or compelling. He talks about how his blog on

cars was never funny, but then describes all these high profile people telling him how hilarious it was.

On the other hand it is an interesting and entertaining overview of the Top Gear show from the 1970s until it suddenly and abruptly shut down in 2015 with the firing of Jeremy Clarkson. Clarkson is a very complex figure in this book: brilliant, likable, hard working, and energetic, but at the same time very difficult to be around. Porter states that while they are a somewhat exaggerated TV version of themselves, James May, Richard Hammond, and Jeremy Clarkson are really like that. And Clarkson would be difficult to be around in large doses.

Overall I recommend this book to Top Gear fans for tons of inside info and background to how the show came about and why it was the way it was, but be ready for it to be less hilarious than the show.

Fred Hughes says

No logic to how it is written. Like a bunch of small blurbs pasted together to make a book. Dissapointing

Grace says

Loved this book so much! Wasn't what I was expecting as I thought it would be mostly about the boys but it focuses on Richard and the actually life of the show and the people who made it. Was well written and the top gear style was ever present :)

Sam Dunn says

If you enjoyed top gear, you'll love this. He mentions the incident that ended the show. I don't agree with him, Clarkson was essential.

clint says

I inhaled this book. It is a fantastic combination of silly but witty jokes, amusing but insightful anecdotes, and genuine historical lore about Top Gear. Porter's clean style and clear voice make for a quick read that takes you into pretty much every aspect of the show you'd always wondered about.

Was it scripted? How the hell did The Stig coach celebrities without revealing his identity? What was it like to get famous? What was it like to get *really* famous? Is Jeremy really like that? Is James really like that?

(I don't think anyone wonders about Hammond—he's pretty clearly just a really nice guy.)

The great part about this book isn't just that it gives you these answers, it's that the answers are way better, funnier, and more revealing than you'd have expected.

Steve says

Great read. Very humerous at times. Last chapter dealing with Clarkson's stupidity could have been more detailed

Jeff Parry says

Very enjoyable

A great insight into the 13 rise and fall of the behemoth that was Top Gear. It made me laugh, it answered some questions and told me of life with the Three Idiots. Well worth a read.

Te Riu Warren says

Couldn't put this one down! A well written tale of Top Gear, and what goes on behind the scenes.

John says

Good book, must read for top gear fans. Incredibly British, if you're not from the UK you'll miss quite a few references in this book.

Justina Contenti says

If you're a Top Gear fan at all this book is a must read. I certainly haven't seen every episode but really enjoyed the insight into how the show came to be, which Porter outlined in this book. It was very funny and I could hardly put it down.
