



5 MINUTES WITH... **Richard Hammond**

Now in his 16th season, *Top Gear*'s Richard Hammond (nicknamed Hamster) chats to **Iain Boyd** about utes, Sir Michael Gambon and the reincarnation of Jeremy Clarkson.

And Jeremy Clarkson has the final say?

If you were talking to Jeremy, then yes. No, we're really a free-thinking triumvirate of individuals allowed to express ourselves as we can. Jeremy is the biggest and the loudest but he is also a coward.

The Ford P100 was a fantastic-looking thing. It's found favour with me, if that's any consolation, Australia.

What do you think has given *Top Gear* its global appeal and longevity?

We are all affected by the simple human need to get from one place to another and to go even further, to do so quickly or in style or while carrying a lot of stuff; and I think that's something that extends beyond driving a car around the Cotswolds in the UK or across the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah. Beyond that, there's an honesty to it. It was created without cynicism because the three of us are genuinely just trying to do our best.

How do you divide up the work and decide who is going to drive which cars?

I love the fact that you dignified it by saying 'work'. When we did America recently, we had the Mercedes SLS, Ferrari 458 and Porsche GT3 RS, and actually there were logical choices to which we wanted to drive. Otherwise it is just a massive argument and sometimes a fight.

If you had a two-seater, which co-host would you take for a spin and who would be on the bus?

Ideally I'd be on the bus! James. You'll end up talking utter rubbish and it's great; you end up just with the exploring ideas that really are rather unexpected and that's great fun – weird conversations. Jeremy's just about shouting, which is like an uncontrollable radio, mostly roaring at people for driving badly or being in the wrong place, just moaning basically. So they're both equally 'entertaining'.

What do you think of Australia's main contribution to the automobile industry, the ute, and why do you think it's never been favoured internationally?

I had one actually – a Subaru. I don't know why because I'm a big fan of the ute. I love the boot. An awful lot of people use pick-ups when they don't need the actual ruggedness and vague off-road ability of them; they would be just as well off with a ute. I also think they look great. The Ford P100 was a fantastic-looking thing. It's found favour with me, if that's any consolation, Australia.

Who has been your favourite guest on *Top Gear* over the years?

I am shielded from that a little as they're welcomed into Jeremy's velvet-lined Winnebago, while I'm sweeping the track! But I've always liked Sir Michael Gambon, because he is a proper petrolhead; he turns up early, I mean really early. He stands about on the track looking wistfully out at the bends he's going to be tackling later on and talking to anybody who will talk about cars. I think he is part of the real deal and that is great; I enjoy that.

Who do you think is the most talented guy to get behind the wheel of a car?

It's a hard question, like who is the most talented painter... I love to sit alongside any rally driver because I think if I sit alongside a circuit driver... I am not a circuit racer – it's witchcraft to me – whereas I sit alongside a rally driver and I can sort of understand what they are doing.

If you and Jeremy were destined to be reincarnated as cars, which would each of you be?

Jeremy would like to think he'd be something desperately sophisticated like a Lamborghini Mauro; a rather elegant, old car; or maybe an Alpha Montreal, something really way out, or a Bugatti Veyron. I think he'd be a big V8 Holden. He'd be some big, uncomplicated, shouty thing, despite seeing himself as a cross between a concert pianist and a physicist. I would come back as oh... oh, I know: my mate had an old Peugeot 205 GTi that he did up as a rally car. It was basic. I would be one of those. ●