



- Abhigyan Ghosh

About TopGear

(For Those Who Live Under a Rock)

A magazine as well as a TV show, we are talking about the TV show only here. Top Gear has been one of the BBC's most commercially successful programmes since its relaunch. It has become a significant show in British popular culture, with episodes also broadcast internationally in many countries in Europe, North America, Southeast Asia and more, making it the most widely broadcast factual television programme in the world. Its success has led to various forms of merchandising, including live tours, special DVD editions and books, as well as spawning a variety of international versions in various countries, including the United States, Australia, South Korea, China and France.

Started in 1977, it initially aired on BBC Midlands and then on BBC Two, which was aired only in the UK. It was rather different from the Top Gear format that most of us are familiar with. The show was only 30 minutes long and covered topics actually related to motoring like new cars, road safety and consumer advice.

After the departure of Jeremy Clarkson in 1999, the show, while still favourable, began to decline, affected further by additional members of the presenting team leaving the programme. Notable faces like Tiff Needell and Vicky Henderson started another well-known show on Channel 4, which was

called Fifth Gear, as they could not use the name Top Gear due to issues with IP rights.

The rendition most of us are familiar with started in 2002 and was the brainchild of Andy Wilman (who still works with the trio on Amazon Prime's 'The Grand Tour') and Jeremy Clarkson. The first season of the show was eerily similar to the format of Fifth Gear with Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and Jason Dawe. In the second season of the show, Jason Dawe was replaced by James May. The new rendition also featured a tame racing driver.

Some say he was a racing driver named Ben Collins and that when he wrote a book, he was sued by the BBC. All we know is, he is called 'The Stig'.

In the words of Jeremy Clarkson from the first episode, "We needed someone who could tame it so we got ourselves a professional racing driver who could post consistently fast lap times. We could not do that now we call this thing the Stig okay. We do not know its name we really do not know its name and no one knows its name. We do not want to know because it is a racing driver and racing drivers have tiny little brains and therefore worthless opinions and they are very dull. Doctors actually call it Mansell syndrome and its job is simply to go out there and drive fast."



The Chemistry of the Original Trio

“What I think what's lovely about the show is this there's a bond and I would call it love between three of you” -- Jonathan Ross to Jeremy Clarkson.

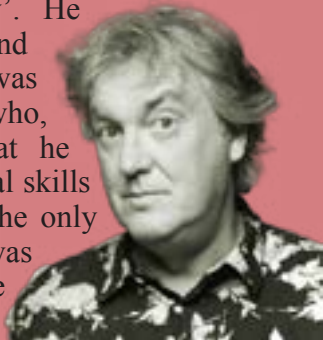
One could argue that Top Gear was not really a motoring show. When we compare it to Fifth Gear, which was a contemporary with far less success and reach, it is easy to see that fans of Top Gear went beyond motorheads.

“I like Top Gear. No, I'm not a car fan I don't really see the allure of vehicles I quite like him and they're quite nice guys but they're not a big deal for me.”

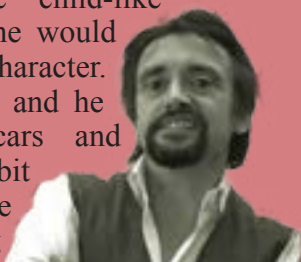
I am again quoting Jeremy Clarkson here: “I genuinely don't think it's a car show. Cars are in it. It is car themed. But it not any more than 'Countryfile' is about actual farming.” Now let us look at the presenters themselves.

Top Gear had 3 presenters who did everything, from car reviews to specials, and each of them had their individual personalities, which did not necessarily reflect on their actual characters.

James May was portrayed as the sensible one. He would choose an Aston Martin over a Ferrari or a Porsche. However, James May actually owns a in real life. He had a more subdued taste in cars but was terrible at finding directions. He was also the most cautious driver in the group and hence was nicknamed 'Captain Slow'. He was the more calculated and rational figure. He was portrayed to be like a nerd who, although is smart in what he knows, often lacks the social skills required, which might be the only legitimate part of him that was carried on to the character he played.

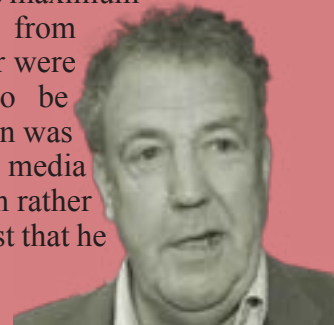


Richard Hammond was short and, as a result, was seen to have more child-like preferences through which he would bring out the humour in his character. His tastes were 'American', and he loved overly fashioned cars and clothes. Since he was also a bit younger than the other two, he was often portrayed as using



too much cosmetic product to attract women, things that teenagers do.

Jeremy Clarkson was a total buffoon. His theory in life was that speed and power could solve everything. He was also the more controversial of the three and the funny one. No one took him seriously, and as a result, the maximum comedic effect came from Jeremy, although the former were not unfunny. This was to be expected as Jeremy Clarkson was seen in the entertainment media for some time as a comedian rather than an automotive journalist that he started out as.

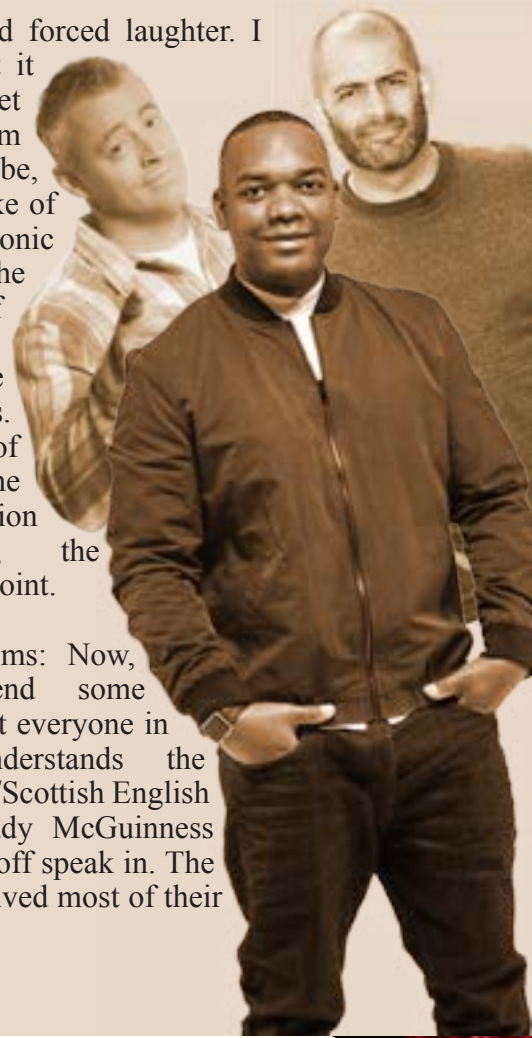


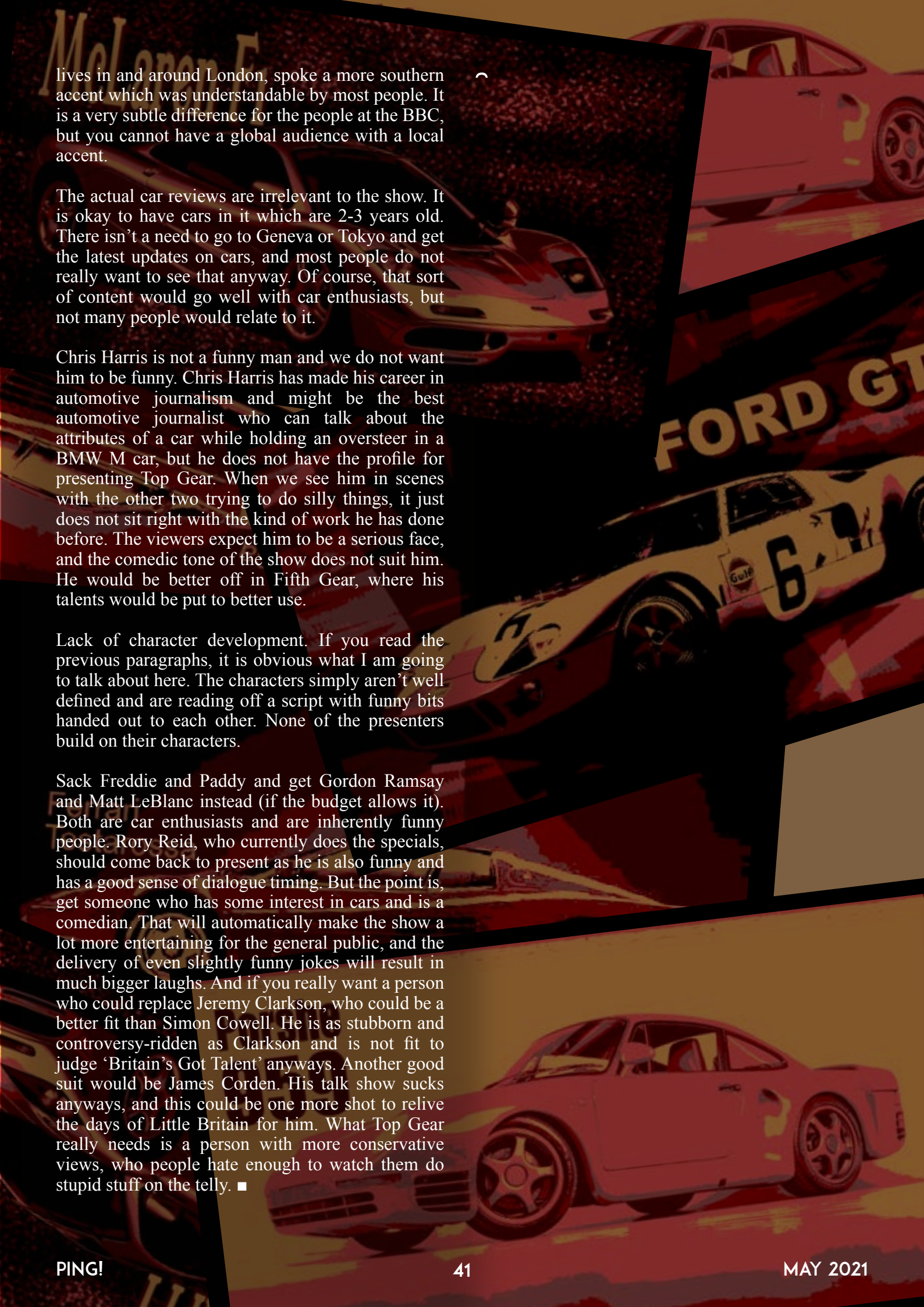
The Problem with the New Set of Presenters

Too many people. At this current moment, there are 5 people and the Stig who appear in all the formats and sections of the show, which in my opinion is too many. You cannot expect people to associate so many not so iconic faces with that show.

No chemistry and forced laughter. I would agree that it is difficult to get three random strangers to vibe, and it was a stroke of luck with the iconic trio, but the element of laughter seems more forced in the new series. Although a lot of jokes in the previous version were scripted, the delivery was on point.

Language problems: Now, this will offend some Britishers, but not everyone in the world understands the Northern English/Scottish English accents that Paddy McGuinness and Freddie Flintoff speak in. The iconic trio, who lived most of their





lives in and around London, spoke a more southern accent which was understandable by most people. It is a very subtle difference for the people at the BBC, but you cannot have a global audience with a local accent.

The actual car reviews are irrelevant to the show. It is okay to have cars in it which are 2-3 years old. There isn't a need to go to Geneva or Tokyo and get the latest updates on cars, and most people do not really want to see that anyway. Of course, that sort of content would go well with car enthusiasts, but not many people would relate to it.

Chris Harris is not a funny man and we do not want him to be funny. Chris Harris has made his career in automotive journalism and might be the best automotive journalist who can talk about the attributes of a car while holding an oversteer in a BMW M car, but he does not have the profile for presenting Top Gear. When we see him in scenes with the other two trying to do silly things, it just does not sit right with the kind of work he has done before. The viewers expect him to be a serious face, and the comedic tone of the show does not suit him. He would be better off in Fifth Gear, where his talents would be put to better use.

Lack of character development. If you read the previous paragraphs, it is obvious what I am going to talk about here. The characters simply aren't well defined and are reading off a script with funny bits handed out to each other. None of the presenters build on their characters.

Sack Freddie and Paddy and get Gordon Ramsay and Matt LeBlanc instead (if the budget allows it). Both are car enthusiasts and are inherently funny people. Rory Reid, who currently does the specials, should come back to present as he is also funny and has a good sense of dialogue timing. But the point is, get someone who has some interest in cars and is a comedian. That will automatically make the show a lot more entertaining for the general public, and the delivery of even slightly funny jokes will result in much bigger laughs. And if you really want a person who could replace Jeremy Clarkson, who could be a better fit than Simon Cowell. He is as stubborn and controversy-ridden as Clarkson and is not fit to judge 'Britain's Got Talent' anyways. Another good suit would be James Corden. His talk show sucks anyways, and this could be one more shot to relive the days of Little Britain for him. What Top Gear really needs is a person with more conservative views, who people hate enough to watch them do stupid stuff on the telly. ■