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WALLIAMS**

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JUST WALLIAMS

There are many faces to the man behind Britain's best-loved comedy creations. Now, David Walliams reveals how he is conquering his demons thanks to the love of his supermodel wife

WORDS PAUL SIMPER PICTURES NICKY JOHNSTON

Sitting comfortably on a chair in our photo studio, his face made up to look like a wooden puppet, David Walliams is trying to explain what he has let himself in for with his latest Comic Relief endurance challenge. It starts today at noon and will finish the same time tomorrow – quite possibly leaving him a gibbering wreck, but hopefully entertaining us enough to open our wallets for the needy here at home and in Africa. “No-one knows how it’s all going to go,” admits David, 39. “The challenge is called 24 Hour Panel People and I’m attempting to film 24 different panel shows at the BBC in 24 hours. I’ll probably be so delirious by the end that I won’t be able to speak.”

MARRIED DAVID

He may be a babbling mess by then, but as half (the taller half) of one of Britain’s most successful comedy duos with Matt Lucas, 36, life seems to be pretty good for David these days. Parked outside *buzz*’s photoshoot is his gleaming black Jaguar, which will later be roaring its way to the airport with David at the wheel as he goes to pick up his wife of nine months, Dutch supermodel Lara Stone, 27.

The pair got married last May at a lavish event at London’s Claridge’s hotel in front of family and showbiz pals such as Sir Elton John, Barbara Windsor, Jonathan Ross, Alan Carr and Dale Winton. Also in attendance were a string of gal pals from his days as Britain’s busiest bachelor, including Natalie Imbruglia, Denise Van Outen and Lisa Snowdon.

The service was followed by an evening bash at swanky private members’ club Shoreditch House in east London, with synchronised swimmers performing in the outdoor rooftop pool to the songs of Frank Sinatra and Shirley Bassey.

So what is it like living with one of the

world’s most in-demand models day-to-day? Is she domesticated? Does she take the bins out? David splutters.

“I’m not going to make my wife take the bins out!” he protests. “Right, dear, when you get back from your Vogue cover shoot, don’t forget to take the rubbish out.” “But yes, she’s domesticated. She cooks – she’s got her Nigella Lawson and Jamie Oliver books. She makes a very nice Jamie pasta dish with sausage. It’s delicious.”

Do they run up massive phone bills when she’s away on modelling assignments?

“It’s rare for there to be a week when she’s not travelling somewhere for a photoshoot, but it’s usually only for a couple of days to New York or Paris,” says David. “I knew that would be the case when we first got together.”

It was documented in the authorised biography *Inside Little Britain* how, just before filming of the first series began in 2003, David suffered from depression brought on by painful experiences from his childhood – and it lasted for an entire year. Although a combination of psychotherapy and antidepressants helped, he was still talking as recently as 2009 about his capacity to “start to unravel” when he was on his own. Then along came Lara.

“Those events were a long time ago,” he says. “But being married has changed all that. I am really happy and content. I’m in a much better place than I’ve ever been. If you’re talking about the many faces of David Walliams, the one when I’m most comfortable in my skin is when I’m sitting at home on the sofa with my wife, watching *The X Factor*. When you’re with someone you love, you feel blissfully calm.”

NAUGHTY DAVID

There have been other times in the past when David has shown his naughtier side, mostly in the name of comedy – and sometimes to the horror of his unsuspecting victims. For one live Comic Relief event, he dressed as one of his *Little Britain* characters, disgraced fictional kids’ TV presenter Des Kaye,



David with poppet, not puppet, wife Lara Stone

whose favourite activity was inviting male celebrities onto the stage to play a game called Hide The Sausage.

"I played it with Holby City actor Jeremy Edwards and pulled down his trousers," says David. "His pants came down at the same time, which was a mistake. It's a very easy mistake to make! But I did expose him to thousands of people at London's Hammersmith Apollo. I did feel bad about it afterwards. But not that bad."

The same thing happened again at another charity event with dapper DJ and producer Mark Ronson, a man not known – as his recent BRITs interview with James Corden would testify – for an abundant sense of humour. David nods.

"I don't think Mark Ronson knew quite what he was letting himself in for," he explains. "I have apologised profusely to him many times since. But he's Mr Cool. He didn't really need to have his trousers pulled down by me. I think maybe it's time for me to move on and not pull down any more people's trousers on stage."

The only serious blot on the Walliams timeline has been the mixed reception that his and Matt's BBC1 spoof airport series, *Come Fly With Me*, received when it hit our screens last Christmas.

A second series has been commissioned by the Beeb and the first series had ten million viewers watching each week. But they weren't expecting the charges of racism levelled at them on internet forums for being transformed into Japanese schoolgirls and characters like West Indian coffee-shop worker Precious Little.

"I was surprised by the 'racism' criticism," he says. "To put it in perspective, 17 million people watched the first episode and the BBC had 22 complaints. But me and Matt just want to make people laugh, not to offend them, so we take even one complaint very seriously."

"As the show is set in an airport, which is a very multi-racial workplace, and we were representing 25 different characters each, it would have been strange if they were all white, middle-aged men."

"None of our characters were defined only by their race. The biggest idiot was the white immigration officer Ian Foot. Yes, we played two Japanese schoolgirls who were obsessed with Martin Clunes. But to me that's surreal. I don't think we were saying all Japanese people are obsessed with Martin Clunes!"

CHARITY DAVID

This weekend's gruelling television marathon is by no means David's first philanthropic dip into the unknown.

His staggering achievement back in 2006, when he swam the Channel in ten hours 34 minutes, turned him – along with Eddie '43 marathons' Izzard – into the poster boy for extraordinary Comic and Sport Relief personal challenges. He swam from Spain to Africa

across the Straits of Gibraltar with James Cracknell in 2008 and last year cycled the length of the UK with Davina McCall, Fearn Cotton, Miranda Hart and others. To date, activities that David has been involved in for Red Nose Day and Sport Relief have raised more than £5million.

So why does he do it? He once said that he didn't think he was a good person and this was some sort of redemption. But is that really all there is to it?

"I love the thrill and the drama," he laughs. "I suppose I have created a rod for my own back, though. I thought after I'd swum the Channel that I'd never have to do anything else good again – how wrong I was about that!"

As a TV game-show geek and a devoted son, there is another delicious reason for doing 24 Hour Panel People.

"I'm going to go on The Generation Game with my mum," he beams. "That was one of my favourite shows growing up. I'm really

hoping we'll get to do the potter's wheel or the morris dancing together. Even just remembering all the items on the conveyor belt will be thrilling.

"For this TV challenge, I'll be hosting some shows, or be a team captain or a guest on others. It's really weird. I think I can be funny for a little bit of time but I'm not sure I can be funny for 24 hours. By four in the morning, am I going to be delirious or just really grumpy?"

"It's quite scary because I'm going to be very exposed as they're filming every minute of it all and streaming it live on the internet. I'm going to be in a bad way. There's no way if I'm up for 24 hours that I'm going to be in control and coherent!"

As our shoot draws to a close, the eerie make-up devised by long-time collaborator Lisa Cavalli-Green (who first worked her magic with such comedy luminaries as Benny Hill and Morecambe & Wise), combined with David's manic goggle-eyed look and dislocated puppet jaw, has put the willies up most of the *buzz* team.

So what face is David wearing now?

"Tired David," he says. "I've been back and forth between London and Cardiff filming Doctor Who, I've just filmed the Fake That spoof with Take That – which is top-secret but will be shown on Comic Relief – and when I leave you now I'm off to start swimming and weight training for my 200-mile run and swim along the River Thames, which I'll be doing for Sport Relief."

Phew! Even the puppet looks knackered at the thought of it.

WATCH IT! 24 HOUR PANEL PEOPLE RUNS FROM SAT 12PM UNTIL SUN 12PM AT WWW.BBC.CO.UK/REDNOSEDAY AND AIRS AS A SERIES FROM 13-17 MARCH, BBC3

Celebrity David

He's a man who knows all manner of stars – from Katie Price to Russell Brand. David gives *buzz* some exclusive celeb goss on his famous pals...

KATIE PRICE, 32

"I had a birthday party at a club in Notting Hill a couple of years ago and Katie revealed a part of her anatomy to my guests – it wasn't the birthday present I was expecting!"



SIR ROGER MOORE, 83

"He called me up on my birthday and sang Happy Birthday to me while I was still in bed. I said: 'I'm in bed, Roger, I'm naked.' He replied: 'So am I.' I said: 'It's such a shame we're not together.' He said: 'I know.' Then I thought: 'What am I doing flirting with Roger Moore? He's in his 80s and he's a knight!'"



RUSSELL BRAND, 35

"I was due to present Russell's radio show the Saturday after Sachsgate in 2008. Andrew Sachs played my father in the BBC2 series Attachments and we stayed friends so I wrote him a letter. Russell and Jonathan Ross knew they'd done something they regretted, but you'd have thought they'd killed someone to be on the news every day for a week."



MATT SMITH, 28

"I can't say much about it but I am playing an alien in Doctor Who called Gibbis. It's a comedy role but most of my scenes are with Matt and Karen [Gillan], so it was a huge thrill for a massive Doctor Who fan like me. I don't have any scenes in the TARDIS but Matt has offered to show me round it. Maybe he's just trying to seduce me!"



"Maybe it's time for me to stop pulling celebs' trousers down – even for charity!"



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Grooming and special effects: Lisa Cavalli-Green. Marionettes supplied by Tony Simmet. www.tonymimmet.co.uk. Pictures: Rex Features, Getty Images, Mavrxonline.com.