

Why is Doc Martin such a hit? We all love a grumpy old so-and-so



CANNY Martin Clunes reckons he knows the secret of Doc Martin's continued success.

The actor, 49, said of the moody medic: "I guess we all just love a grumpy old so-and-so."

The Cornwall-based comedy drama has become the saviour of ITV's weekday schedule, with the fifth series pulling in nine million viewers – three times more than much-hyped roulette show *Red or Black*.

It is back on Monday nights after a two-year absence, and Clunes said: "Doc Martin is about as grumpy as you can get. He's got even worse as the years go by."

Cuddly

"I saw some re-runs a few months ago and was thinking, 'Who's this cuddly guy?'"

But getting the character right is no easy feat for the scriptwriters.

Speaking of the gap between series, Clunes said: "We always take a two-year break because it takes a long time to do it."

"I'm sure it looks like every other programme but it's not an easy one to write when you consider you have a main protagonist who hates everyone and everyone hates him."

Even being a dad doesn't seem to have cheered up Doctor Martin Ellingham.

Caroline Catz plays primary school head Louisa Glasson, the mother of his son. But Clunes said of his character

EXCLUSIVE
by COLIN ROBERTSON

"People in England spend a lot of time saying sorry, but not this one."

The popular actor created Doc Martin himself and his wife Philippa produces the show through the couple's TV firm Buffalo Pictures – but he is nothing like his character.

He said: "I sort of made him up. It seemed like something nice for me to act. I'm like every other luvvie – I want people to like me. So it's liberating doing something where you're the complete opposite." But he added: "I'd be really unhappy if I thought the next bit of

acting I did was the next series of Doc Martin. I used to do a lot of different parts. I miss doing other acting but I don't get asked to do



I think a Men Behaving Badly comeback would be a really bad idea

that much – I've no idea why. I haven't been offered a job by ITV in five years.

"Maybe people think I'm too busy doing Doc Martin. Or maybe they think I'm so associated with that job that I carry that baggage with me."

For many telly fans Clunes will forever be the drunken oaf Gary Strang from the BBC's *Men Behaving Badly*.

Just this summer Neil Morrissey, who played pal Tony, suggested it was ripe for a comeback. But Clunes is not so sure. He said: "I'm self-employed so I should welcome new work, but it would probably be a bad idea. We'd end up spoiling people's memory of it because it was so good and such a fun."

Besides, he added, "I'm Gary today would not have the same youthful exuberance of his 90s former self. He said: "I'm 50 this year. It would be a little bit seedy. Gary would be doing exactly the same, working for a small insur-

ance firm. He wasn't exactly aspirational. It's not sounding very funny, is it? It's probably best to quit while ahead."

Even a remake, with younger actors reprising the roles, is not something that excites Clunes: "I don't think remakes ever have quite the same spirit. I played Reggie Perrin a second time round. It wasn't exactly a glittering success."

"If they told me they were making it into a Hollywood movie with Colin Farrell and Denzel Washington then I'd be happy for that to happen. But I'm not sure it's likely."

These days, acting isn't Clunes's only passion.

He owns a 130-acre farm in Dorset where he keeps 14 horses and is patron of The Horse Course, a scheme aimed at helping prisoners.

Angry

He said: "It's a strategy for dealing with their moods."

"Horses are great teachers. These guys, especially young offenders, are stuck in patterns of behaviour and they don't know how to deal with it."

"If you shove an angry young man in a round pen with a horse, the horse will pick up on that in a second and it will either run away from you or run you over."

"Seeing these kids getting a horse to do something for them simply by controlling their own moods is incredible. It makes people feel great about themselves. It certainly works for me."

Doc Martin airs on Monday nights at 9pm on ITV1

Dad Martin... Clunes with his co-star Caroline and on-screen son

People in England spend a lot of time saying sorry... but not Doc Martin

Clunes to help horses change inmates' lives

By **RENE GERRYTS**

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TV STAR Martin Clunes has agreed to help an Askerswell single mother-of-three who is changing young prisoners' lives through her horses.

Harriet Laurie has studied natural horsemanship for years and seen how the principles and philosophy helps both troubled horses and the humans who practise it.

When lawyer friends asked her to work with an American prisoner, who had been released after 17 years on death row, she agreed.

The success of this led to Harriet using her horses and the techniques on inmates at Portland Young Offenders Institution.

Former South Dorset MP and now Lord Jim Knight agreed to be the first patron of TheHorseCourse and now Martin Clunes has agreed to join him.

The Doc Martin, who admits his own horses soothe him when he is wound up, said: "I think this is terrific.

"I am quite new to horses myself and I was interested in the reaction of the guys to the horses and how they made them feel.

"Horses are great teachers and it seems a great use of horses for what could otherwise be another discarded person.

"It is another great example of equine assisted therapy."

Harriet took time off her job as a design and marketing consultant to do the first course over seven sessions with four prisoners last year.

After completing the first course many inmates went on to sign up for educational opportunities and for the first time ever a prisoner gave the governor a lesson.

Now some of the 20 prisoners who have done the course are coming back to help teach it.

Prison staff have been amazed at the transformation.

Governor Steve Holland said: "We are constantly looking for fresh and innovative ways



HORSE SENSE
Harriet with her horses at Portland Young Offenders Institution. Inset, TV star Martin Clunes

Star to be a patron of Harriet's project

to engage with prisoners and help them make adjustments to either their attitudes or behaviour.

"There are certain prisoners who are difficult to reach.

"I've been astounded at how much progress can be made with this sort of lad using natural horsemanship techniques."

YOI head of training Mike Summers added: "I would say it's the biggest change in an individual over a two-week period that I've ever witnessed."

The prisoners said the course taught them how to control their emotions and has given them confidence in their ability to learn.

Harriet said: "They get a whole new understanding of their own emotions.

"My horses are specially trained to give very clear feedback on body language and attitude - to get the tasks done, the

prisoners have to be calm, focused and communicate clearly, or the horses will not co-operate - which can be quite scary.

"Over seven sessions we build new habits of behaviour which lead on to greater self control and the willingness to engage in vocational or academic training.

"If we don't change these guys while they are in prison, they will come out the same, or worse than they went in."

Harriet has secured initial funding from the Shackleton Foundation and is through to the second round with a major UK trust that would enable her to take the idea to other prisons in the country.

Bournemouth and Southampton Universities are putting together an evaluation report of the project which will be out shortly.

Beware of scam lottery call

A CONMAN told an elderly Bridport woman she had won the lottery in an attempt to trick money out of her.

Police are warning people to be on guard after the 81-year-old was targeted over the phone.

PC Mike Brown, of Bridport Police, said: "An 81-year-old female from the Bridport area was contacted over the phone by

a male telling her that she had won the National Lottery and that she needed to pay £550 into a bank account.

"The male gave details of the sort code and account number.

"He stated that once the money had been paid into the account the lady would receive £1,050 paid back into her account."

PC Brown added: "I would like

to warn other residents to stay vigilant and not to part with any money in the above circumstances.

"I would urge residents to take extra care when dealing with cold callers and obtain full details to verify that the company is legitimate."

The man called the pensioner on September 8.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Witnesses wanted after raid on home

BURGLARS have stolen jewellery and electrical items from a house at Melbury Osmond.

Police say two men entered the home at about 11.30am on Friday, September 9. They fled with a laptop, cameras and a distinctive dolphin ring.

Witnesses and anyone with information can call the police on 01305 222 222 quoting incident number 9:173.

Driver hits house

A PENSIONER was checked over by paramedics after hitting a house with his car in Beaminstor.

Police said that the elderly man was taken home by ambulance crew after the collision at 11.35am on Monday, September 12 in East Street.

Police said that firefighters were called to help the man out of his car and that there was minor damage to the vehicle.

Crash blocks A35

THE A35 was blocked on Thursday afternoon after a white Volvo car transporter was in collision with a silver Ford transit van just after 3pm.

Police and ambulance attended the accident which happened near the old Texaco roundabout.

The driver of the van suffered slight injuries, said a police spokesman.

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HORSE TONIC FROM DOC MARTIN



THERAPY: Martin Clunes is backing a scheme to help prisoners by enabling them to have contact with horses

BY **RENE GERRYTS**

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TV star backs jail therapy sessions



HORSE COURSE: Harriet Laurie is helping prisoners at Portland Young Offender Institution

a design and marketing consultant to do the first course over seven sessions with four prisoners last year.

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■ newsdesk@dorsetecho.co.uk

Car clean with a message

DRIVERS will have the chance to brush up on their knowledge of fire safety while receiving a gleaming polish for their cars.

Firefighters at stations across Dorset are taking part in the Firefighters' Charity car wash day this Saturday.

Crews will be prepared with buckets and sponges and inviting people to make a donation for the annual fundraising event.

Among the stations taking part are Bere Regis

(10am-3pm), Gillingham (10am-2pm), Shaftesbury (10am-2pm) and Charmouth (10am-4pm).

Richard Cowley, a firefighter at Ferndown and a Firefighters' Charity representative, said: "Fire services see first hand how fire can destroy lives and devastate communities on a daily basis."

"If we can educate people about safety around the home, lives can be saved. Also we want to raise money to help injured colleagues and provide the essential support services to their families."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Molly is ahead in hat contest

WEST DORSET: A hat made by Bridport feltmaker Molly Bruce has been shortlisted in a competition held as part of the town's Hat Festival.

The prizewinner will be announced on Saturday following a presentation of the 10 finalists at the Bull Hotel.

Witness appeal after hit-and-run

COUNTY: Police are appealing for witnesses and anyone with information to come forward after a hit-and-run crash.

A Honda Civic collided with a Citroen C1 in Holes Bay Road, Poole on Monday evening and failed to stop.

Police plea after suitcase stolen

MINTERNE MAGNA: A suitcase was stolen from the boot of a car in the village.

Witnesses are asked to contact police.

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FLOWER & STORMY GO TO PRISON

Have you ever thought how much of our communication is done by our body language? Perhaps most of us have learned social skills to defuse a situation where a message of hostility or anger is being displayed and are barely aware of the reason.

Horses are incredibly receptive to these body signs and in the 1980s a new way of training them (Parelli Natural Horsemanship) was developed, achieving "success without force, partnership without dominance and harmony without coercion". An amazing trust builds up between horse and trainer but this only works when the body language is right.

Then a bright lateral thinker hit on the idea that this could be a two-way message. If a trained horse would only perform if the body language was right, why shouldn't a human learn to modify the signals they were giving out to gain the horse's cooperation? And this is what Harriet Laurie from Askerswell does with her Parelli trained thoroughbred mare Flower and Connemara pony Stormy. She is running courses at the Young Offenders' establishment on Portland and achieving remarkable success. If the horse displays signs of tension when asked to perform some movement, then the handler must understand that it is the message he is sending which is causing the block – and learn how to modify it. As for the horse's body language, the angle of their ears usually tells exactly how they are reacting. From this the young prisoners begin to understand how this can be taken back into their everyday life. The feeling of achievement is something completely new to most of them and a huge boost for their self-esteem.

They are not learning to ride; they are learning to get the horse's cooperation to be led on a loose rope, back, bend down a line of cones, jump over a raised pole, turn in a tight circle, walk sideways and even put their front feet on a box three pallets high – all this from the ground. They do get a little bareback riding at the end as a reward for their achievements.



The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Harriet's courses are highly praised by the prison management and she is building up an impressive body of professional people to support this work and help her get funding. The project is currently being studied by the University of Southampton.

So don't think, "Pony Club for prisoners? What nonsense. They are there to be punished". Just picture what has led them to be put inside: probably a lifetime of anger and tension which affects all their behaviour. With this newly learned ability to control their emotions they have a much greater chance of coming to terms with life in the community in the future. Well done, Stormy, Flower and Harriet.

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