

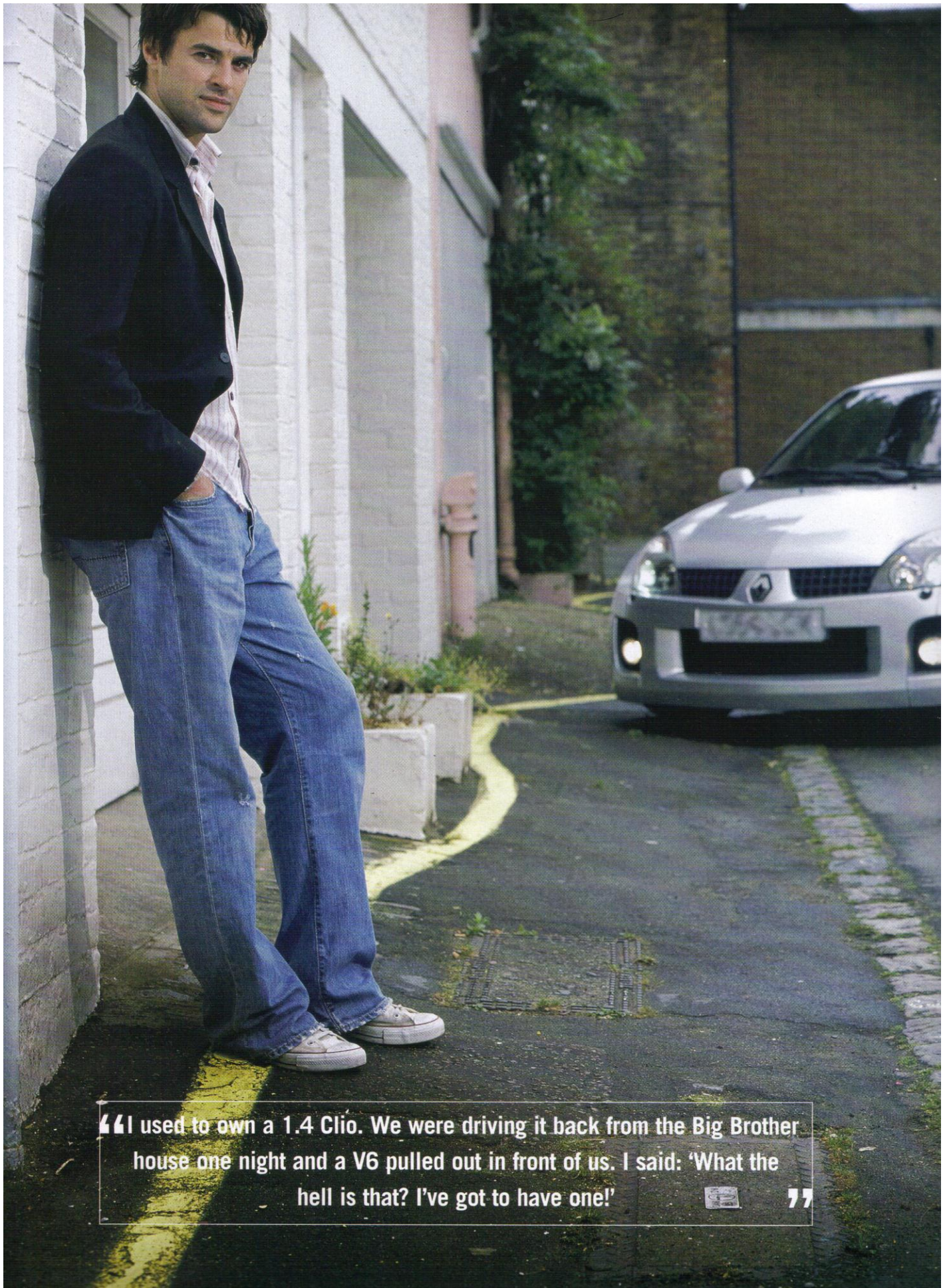


ENTER THE dragon

Turning heads with *T4*'s strapping Welsh presenter Steve Jones and his beast of a car – a Clio Renaultsport V6 255

Words > Jim Merrett Pictures > Richard Parsons





“I used to own a 1.4 Clio. We were driving it back from the Big Brother house one night and a V6 pulled out in front of us. I said: ‘What the hell is that? I’ve got to have one!’”

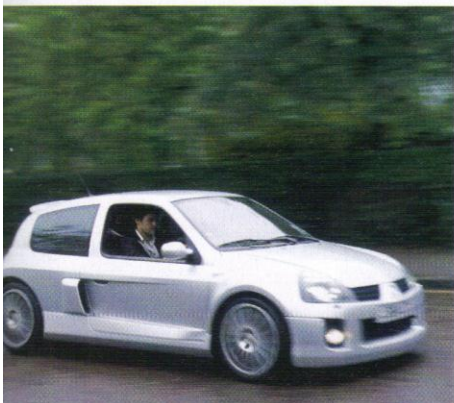
Left Steve affectionately calls his Clio V6 255 'The Beast'



LIKE HIS MODE OF TRANSPORT, TO call Steve Jones 'a bit racy' is an understatement. With the unofficial title of 'the sexiest Welshman since Tom Jones' under his belt and the kind of accent to make even the hardiest of women go weak at the knees, the presenter has carved a nice little niche for himself wooing (often only too literally) celebrities for *T4* – Channel 4's breezy Sunday morning show.

As a journalist, your instinct is usually to stand back and not get too involved in an interviewee's life, but that's a rule that Steve has – to his credit – chosen to ignore. He's flirted with the likes of Halle Berry and, if the press can be believed, he's exchanged phone numbers with Angelina Jolie. But probably his most infamous act to date involves a 37-year-old mother of two. A 37-year-old mother of two who also happens to have appeared on the front cover of *Playboy* more times than anyone else in the magazine's history.

"We're just good friends who enjoy each other's company a lot," he says when pressed about his entanglement with Pamela Anderson which resulted in an on-screen kiss. "I'm a gentleman so I couldn't say any more than that." He is clearly used to this avenue of questioning, and though he doesn't mind going down it, it is a dead end. Thankfully for both of us we've got something else to talk about.



Three months ago, Steve took possession of a very special car. Like his last set of wheels, it's a Clio, but this time one with the thrust of a three-litre engine forced upon its tiny frame. Steve affectionately calls it 'The Beast' – its number is V6 255.

"I used to own a 1.4 Clio. We were driving it back from the Big Brother house one night and a V6 pulled out in front of us. I said: 'What the hell is that? I've got to have one!'"

Not for the faint-hearted, to climb into a Clio Renaultsport V6 255 is to play with fire. With a maximum speed of 153mph and a 0 to 62 time of just 5.8 seconds, it's not your average family run-around, not least because there are only two seats. If you could choose one car to hurtle unblinking into the apocalypse, this would be it. And for all the will in the world, sometimes that power gets the better of you, as Steve can testify.

"Never park in anger is my advice," he shares, explaining a recent misunderstanding between one of his alloys and the curb.

You can't help thinking that if one car was built especially for the Celtic Casanova, it is the Clio V6. "Actually, if you knew me, you'd think it was a bit out of character," Steve protests.

"I like to keep things in my life pretty minimal. I'm not particularly into materialism, but my car is the one material item I physically

love. I like beautiful-looking objects, and that's what it is... Such an unusual looking car."

But with such a gift comes responsibility. "It is a constant anxiety," he says. "I have a garage under my house where I keep it – I couldn't cope with the constant worry of having it parked in the street."

Scuffs aside, it is size that makes the Clio V6 the perfect supercar for the cluttered streets of London. And with those statistics – obviously adhering to the speed limits – it's also the perfect getaway vehicle. Says Steve: "The reason I bought the car is to get back and forth from Wales." Not that he gets a chance to do it that much. "I'm so busy at work," he says. Work? *T4* seems more like fun in my book. "It really is as much fun as it seems on TV," he is forced to admit. "If not more so."

As in any job, it is the people you work with who make it a pleasure. "Working in TV is an accelerated way towards friendship – the crew are all my mates," says Steve. "I have a fantastic time and I hope that comes across on camera."

You can see where the Clio V6 slots into the celebrity lifestyle. What you can't quite see is where Steve fits in with it. "I don't go to any late night celebrity parties. Off the screen, I'm a very private person, I like to keep an air of mystique. Only I've done myself a disservice with this car as now everyone looks. I'm not exactly low-key



LEFT Steve says the Clio V6 255 is the perfect car for driving around town

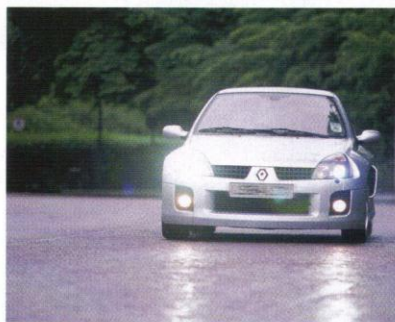
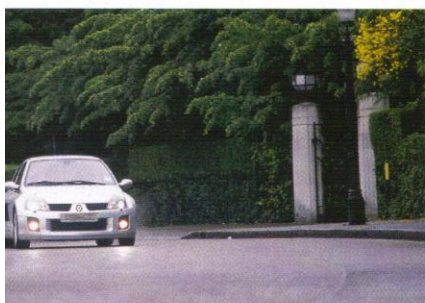
when I'm going around town. In fact, I'm my own worst enemy."

A good-looking chap, you would expect him to be used to the attention but it turns out that the Clio is a cunning decoy. "People always notice the car first. And then they see the boy from *T4* driving it."

The Clio V6 does not attract members of the opposite sex in the way you would expect, either. "I don't think it's a lady's car," Steve says. "It's more of a bloke's car."

"But people can think what they want – I love it so I don't really care. It is just for me and nobody else."

Curiously, the one place Steve can retreat to away from the glare of the limelight is his native Wales. Viewers with terrestrial television in the land of his fathers are treated to S4C rather than Channel 4. With a number of Welsh-language programmes to squeeze into the schedules, T4 is one of the casualties; only those with access to magical satellite television get to wake up with Steve at the weekend. "In Wales, hardly anyone knows me. More people recognise me in London than in Cardiff."



A Rhondda lad, Steve began his presenting career in Wales, where outbursts of song still echo through the verdant valleys. He made his debut – reluctantly, as it turns out – on *The Pop Factory*, Cymru's more credible answer to *Top of the Pops*. "I'd never presented in my life. I didn't even want to do it."

Steve ended up lending his face to the programme for four years. Based in an old soft-drinks factory just outside the Welsh capital, *The Pop Factory* studio attracted top bands such as The Darkness, Super Furry Animals, Busted, Feeder and The Thrills. But the programme is really just a front – on top of running a film-making suite, the people behind the show organise all manner of live events and festivals. And the whole enterprise is that bit cooler than if it had been set up in England.

Steve's first trip to the gold-paved streets of London led to a very interesting proposition – a programme called *99 Things To Do Before You Die*. The series gave Steve a list of tasks, some of which he admits he could have done without.

"The worst thing was the sharks because they scare the bejabbers out of me. They put me in a tank with eight nurse sharks – that was terrifying."

"But I was up for most things. I was young and coming up to London. At that point, I would have done anything."

These days, Steve has a bit more choice about what he does. His contract means he is tied to Channel 4, but it has given him a chance to branch out a little, trying his hand at acting – he's appearing in a drama project that he can't talk about yet.

"I get to play someone completely different," is about all he can divulge. "After four years of being just Steve, in this drama I'm James – which was very nice."

Perhaps his work will eventually take him to Hollywood, where he has already made something of an impression. Not bad for a boy from the Valleys.

From small cars with cartoon proportions back full-circle to Pamela Anderson. Probably best known for her red swimsuit-clad slow-motion jogs along a stretch of Californian beach, you can't quite imagine her down the Gower in South Wales. But the *Baywatch* icon – who surely enjoys the thrill of the chase – has shown a keen interest in Steve's homeland.

"She's asked me if I could drive her there to meet my parents. I said no because it is too far." And I'm not sure what my parents would make of her either!"

The Clio Renaultsport V6 255 costs from £27,100 on the road. Production finishes in July so to get your hands on one of the remaining cars, you'll need to be quick! For more information, visit www.renaultsport.co.uk, call 0800 52 51 50 or see your local Renault Dealer.

