



TOP GEAR,
SUNDAY, 8PM,
BBC2

ON TOP FORM

Top Gear starts its 20th series in style

Ever stopped to ask yourself which of the world's most famous taxis – London's legendary black cabs, for example, or New York's yellow variety – would come out best in a head-to-head? Likewise, have you ever wondered how successfully an America's Cup yacht would compete, speed-wise, when raced against a car?

Or what would happen if you tried to enhance a car by giving it a "hovercrafty" quality designed to keep you moving in a flood?

It's a "no", isn't it? To all those questions? And understandably.

That's because there are people whose full-time job it is to ponder such mysteries then set out to solve them, usually on a spectacular scale and with unpredictable results.

These are the *Top Gear* team – Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May – and the challenges we've listed are a few we'll be seeing in the latest series, starting tomorrow night on BBC2.

This will be the 20th series of *Top Gear* in its current guise but there's no sign of its popularity waning.

Charlie Turner, *Top Gear Magazine's* Editor-in-Chief, says: "*Top Gear* is pure escapism, whether you're a petrolhead or a petrolhead's gran. The secret to that success is a combination of smart ideas and tons of hard work. I think *Top Gear* also appeals to people's sense of adventure. In the last 10 years the team have driven to the North Pole, crossed deserts, sailed to France in home-made amphibious

cars and found the source of the River Nile."

Top Gear has become a massive brand. Its magazine has 33 international editions, its website has five million users, its Facebook page has 19 million fans and more than 700,000 people follow it on Twitter. But at the heart of this success is the TV show. Shown in 212 territories, it reaches a global audience of 350 million and central to it is the chemistry between Clarkson, May and Hammond.

"When three mates meet every week for 10 years they get to know each other pretty well," Charlie says. "They know how to make each other laugh. They know how to wind each other up."

"It's impossible to manufacture that sort of familiarity, so when you see them having a laugh or getting a bit grumpy, it's real and perhaps that's what viewers appreciate. When people ask what they're like in the office, my answer is always the same – just like they are on telly. There's an extra energy when they're around. Plus lots of shouting."

But energy, shouting, joking, laughing – surely none of this would amount to much if the presenters weren't seriously clued-up?

Charlie agrees. "Ultimately these are three guys who really know what they're talking about. It's their ability to make even the most complex – or potentially boring – subject matter accessible and entertaining that makes *Top Gear* unique."

Mike Ward

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF CHARLIE TURNER