

STAR ON HIS FAVE FOOD, FUNNYMEN AND CELEBRITY FLOPS

Gregg goes scoff on one

THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW
Gregg Wallace
MASTERCHEF HOST

AT a petrol station somewhere on the French-Swiss border, MasterChef's Gregg Wallace is busy working his way through a huge chicken baguette.

"And my beautiful wife Anna has a toasted ham and cheese ciabatta," he informs me.

Wow, I tell him. Living the dream. "Well, yeah," he agrees. "Until she looks round and realises her husband's a fat bald bloke twice her age!"

Gregg and Anna are actually on holiday destination Tuscany, but they've broken their journey for fuel, a bite to eat and so that Gregg can sit and chat with me on his mobile.

It's to talk about Celebrity MasterChef, with which he and co-host John Torode return on Thursday. But it seems Gregg has other things he'd also like to get off his chest. Some serious - we'll get to those in a moment - and some less so.

"Write to the BBC calling for John Torode's dismissal," he jokes in full wind-up mode, "unless he starts to pronounce food products correctly. We've had enough of him saying 'yoh-gur' and 'pars-ta'. It's got to stop, here and now!"

Gregg is in no doubt that his cooking contest's celebrity version - where Gemma Collins, Frankie Bridge and Spencer Matthews are among this year's contestants - is the most enjoyable.

"Out of this, the regular version and the professional one, it's the funniest. Some of the worst cooks you'll ever see on MasterChef have appeared on it. It's just hilarious."

All right, Gregg, so come on, name names.

"Well, there was that one who was married to a footballer. From Liverpool, glamour model, I'm trying to remember her name."

Danielle Lloyd?

"That's it! She wanted to do pasta with a jar of pesto."

"And there was the

lovely lady from Bucks Fliz, Cheryl Baker, trying to flambe her dish. I was on my knees, crying with laughter."

As for the more impressive contestants, I suggest maybe Rylan Clark-Neal, inset, was one of the biggest surprises of recent years.

"I love him," agrees Gregg. "What's brilliant about Rylan, and I've rarely seen this before, is he's a perfect mimic. Show him how to cook something and he can just do it."

"He did not really have much knowledge but he could copy well. Even a McDonald's Happy Meal. It was the closest I've got to the real thing outside a yellow M."

Talking of fast food, that serious rant mentioned earlier is largely about what Gregg calls food snobbery.

"It really gets up my nose," he tells me. "Is a chicken Caesar salad really healthier than a Big Mac?"

"And is a kebab really bad for you? Just because poor people eat them, it doesn't make them s+s+t."

He also gets riled when food firms make dubious claims about their products being good for us.

"We should prosecute manufacturers and advertisers who even suggest their product is healthy when it's not. If it's got above a certain level of sugar, fat or salt, the packaging should have a skull and crossbones on it."

But despite such pronouncements, Gregg Wallace is not a guy who seems full of his own importance.

Few things have made him chuckle more, for example, than hearing comedian Micky Flanagan impersonate him.

"Fantastic, honestly! Micky, bless him, doing Gregg Wallace."

"Right, let's 'ave it! Sort ahh! 'Gissa 'nother tin o' custer tin o' custer! Let's 'ave it! I'm gonna go



WALLACE FAVOURITES

TV SHOW: MasterChef!
FILM: It's A Wonderful Life
ACTOR: Tom Hanks
COMEDIAN: Micky Flanagan, right
SPORTSPERSON: Christian Wicks
WIFE: Anne-Marie Sterpini
SONG: Gentle On My Mind
FOOD: Italian
DRINK: Beer
APP: Weight Watchers
HOLIDAY SPOT: Tuscany
CITY: London
ANIMAL: Dog

and get married again!"

I've never laughed so much. My wife was almost wetting herself with laughter.

And what about rival food shows?

"I like Come Dine With Me," he says. "And I used to watch Bake Off on the BBC."

But ultimately nothing's a patch on MasterChef, right? As Gregg's slogan used to say, cooking doesn't get tougher than this.

Talking of which, why did he stop using that line on the show? Did he get fed

up with it? Seems not.

"I'm sad it doesn't appear on MasterChef," he says. "I used to love it."

Oh, so it wasn't Gregg's decision to drop it?

"No! You're crediting me with far too much influence. In the end, I'm just a spoon for hire, that's all."

• Celebrity MasterChef returns on BBC One, Thursday at 6pm, Friday at 8.30pm.



ON THE MENU: Frankie Bridge, John Partridge, Anita Harris, Spencer Matthews and Jean Johansson

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