



That's Entertainment

Whether it's treading the boards in panto, stepping into the latest reality TV show or fundraising on stage for charity, Oxshott's Bobby Davro has been entertaining audiences for decades. During his 60th year, he shows no sign of slowing down

WORDS: Tim Saunders

After five gruelling weeks of camping in the depths of Dorset with Michelle Collins and Cheryl Baker for TV Show, *Celebrity 5 Go Camping*, which aired at the beginning of the year, Bobby Davro has happily packed away his tent and waterproofs.

Now, will comic legend Bobby Davro put his feet up for a well earned rest for the rest of the year? Not a bit of it, reveals the legendary funny man.

"I'm always looking forward," says Bobby, who speaks to me after returning from Benidorm. "I'm Smee in the Easter pantomime of *Peter Pan* from April 20 to 25, which travels to three theatres: Tyne Theatre & Opera House, Newcastle upon Tyne, Baths Hall, Scunthorpe and Victoria Theatre, Halifax."

Bobby is no stranger to pantomime; he starred as Idle Jack in *Dick Whittington* for last year's panto in Southampton, he has also played Buttons in *Cinderella*, Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* and appeared in *Jack and the Beanstalk* as well as *Robin Hood*. He has twice starred as Wishee Washee in *Aladdin*, once with Melinda Messenger.

The next 12 months certainly look exhausting for the Oxshott-based entertainer with voiceover work, corporate gigs and speaking engagements intermingled with television appearances, live performances with Jimmy Carr and charity work. And of course the occasional trip abroad for business and pleasure – Bobby is a big golf fan.

A passionate fundraiser Bobby, who turned 60 in September, likes the music of Gilbert O'Sullivan who is one of his closest chums, and has organised numerous galas – featuring his celebrity friends including Jim Davidson, Jeremy Kyle and Shakin' Stevens – raising hundreds of thousands of pounds for Woking & Sam Beare Hospices, which cared for his mother, Janet Nankeville.

Bobby has also been a patron of Shooting Star Chase, the Surrey children's hospice that provides palliative care to families with children who are affected with life-limiting conditions. He raises



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“As a long-standing supporter of Variety, I am delighted to help launch a new fundraising initiative by Gala Bingo Clubs that aims to raise £250,000 for Variety”

LEFT: Off-duty, at home in Surrey
ABOVE: Entering the Big Brother House

funds for Kids 'n' Cancer, Care After Combat and Variety. Bobby helped Gala Bingo launch a new charity game to raise funds for Variety with a guaranteed winner in each one of the company's 129 clubs. "As a long-standing supporter of Variety, I am delighted to help launch a new fundraising initiative by Gala Bingo Clubs that aims to raise £250,000 for Variety," he says. "I know what a difference these funds will make to the lives of children and young people throughout the UK."

When he's not busy entertaining, Bobby enjoys spending time with his family and goes shopping with youngest daughter Marnie, 18, although he admits he usually hates shopping.

He also likes to take long walks with his three daughters: Brittany (23), Tierney (20) and Marnie and go to the local pubs in the area. "The Plough in Cobham and The Ivy in Cobham both serve

excellent food," he says. "I love Shepherd's Pie and my favourite drink is gin and tonic with cucumber."

For a decade he was married to former Page 3 model Trudi Jameson, the mother of his daughters. They divorced in 2003. Eldest daughter Brittany has just started her first proper job as a lawyer, he adds, "I'm so proud of her as I am of all of my girls."

After he left school, Bobby worked as a trainee manager at Bentalls department store in Kingston, where he was soon trying out more impressions as John Inman and Mrs Slocombe. His next job was in his father's retail store, Davro Discount Stores in Middlesex, but later left the shop to pursue a full-time career in show business.

Bobby made his television debut in 1981 but his major breakthrough came with an appearance in *Live at Her*

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Majesty's in 1983. This led to his own Saturday night series *Bobby Davro on the Box*, *Bobby's Sketch Pad* and *TV Weekly*, which topped television ratings for six consecutive years. At the height of his fame his weekly TV shows attracted 10 million viewers.

In 1991, Bobby moved to the BBC and made three series, *Public Enemy Number One*, *Rock With Laughter* and *Run the Risk*. He returned to our screens in May 1997 as host of Yorkshire Television's *Winner Takes All*, for 65 programmes. Versatility seems to be the key to Bobby's longevity, as a high-profile personality.

"I want to go on TV to perform," he says. "I'm not conceited, but I am good at what I do. It's just the vehicles are not there anymore."

He recalls how an impression he made as a child resulted in a severe reprimand. "I made an early impression at school, when I was caught mimicking my headmaster – a Harold Wilson sound-a-like – I was given six of the best."

His greatest inspiration was the late great Robin Williams. "He was the greatest comedian I have ever seen. I met him only once. It was one of the most special moments of my life."

Back in 2003, Bobby was one of the contestants in the first series of Channel 4 reality TV show *The Games*, in which 10 celebrities competed against each other in Olympic-style events.



TOP: Bobby Davro and the late Robin Williams

BELOW: Bobby heads off camping with fellow ex-Eastender Michelle Collins

Unfortunately Bobby doesn't take after his father, Bill Nankeville, a champion runner who represented Great Britain in the 1948 and 1952 Olympic Games, and despite strong efforts, didn't make the finals.

Since then, he has taken part in many other reality shows including *Dancing on Ice* with professional skater Molly Moenkhoff, *Celebrity Big Brother* and *Come Dine with Me*.

He also appeared on Channel 5's *In Therapy*, where audiences watched him really open up to therapist Mandy Saligari about his divorce and family issues.

Despite going through some hard times, Bobby says entertaining others is good therapy. "The measure of success is happiness and peace of mind," he says. "Laughter is the best medicine, not only for the audience but sometimes for the comedian as well." ♦



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