

A photograph of Ewen Page, a man with short brown hair and a slight smile, wearing a red and white vertically striped button-down shirt. He is pointing his right index finger towards the camera. The background is dark with some blurred lights and a checkered pattern.

**TOP GEAR**  
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Our man **Ewen Page** chats with fellow TGA host Shane Jacobson about cars, crashes, and keeping up with Clarkson and the boys

Photography: Phillip Costleton

**When it was announced you would be hosting TopGear Australia, people I know were saying, "Here we go, another try-hard celebrity faking an interest in cars so they can host a TV show." The thought being that you probably had a deal with a car company and you couldn't tell the difference between a tailpipe and a crack pipe. That's not quite accurate though, is it?**

Licences were the first things I started collecting. I came from an era when you were told that the more skills you got, the more employable you were. So I've got licences for a motorbike, a car...  
**...yes, but were they your licences? You weren't stealing them?**

No, but I've had mine 'borrowed'. The police had it for a while. Everyone says to me, "Have you ever lost your licence?" I've never lost it; I've known exactly where it was until they gave it back to me. Every now and then I had it involuntarily stored elsewhere.

**So you had a car and bike licence...**

...a truck licence. Heavy rigid...

**Heavy rigid! (Laughs that hyena cackle)**

I have a heavy rigid licence, and a licence to be heavy and rigid. A semi-trailer licence, a bus licence.

**Ever used that bus licence?**

No. I've used the truck licence, but not the bus licence.

**I've ridden with you. I don't really**

**want to be on an interstate Greyhound with you at the wheel.**

Why not? People pay money to go to a fun park and go on a ride that scares them. You'll do it for free...

Yeah! Pull up in a bus and call it "The Hoax Train". (Slightly uncomfortable, uncontrolled giggling follows.) My favourite bus story is, I had to go to Adelaide once a year...

**...which is about all anyone can tolerate...**

...to watch some mates in stage shows. And we'd fill a bus to go over and see it, then hit Hindley Street and have a few drinks. At about 3am, I remember standing at the bar and this bloke beside me says (drunken voice),

"How you goin'?" And I said, "Yeah, good."

And he said, "Rooley good to seeeeeeeeeeeeeee you again," or something. And I said, "Sorry, I do know your face from somewhere where do I know you from?" And he says, "I'm your bus driver!" We were leaving at eight o'clock the next morning! When we got on the bus five hours later, he looked grey, like he'd just gone to bed. He was nodding off at the wheel so we all took it in turns every time he nodded to shout at him. "HEY MATE! HOW ARE YOU GOING?" I've also got scissor lift and forklift licences, boom lift...

**Boom lift?**

Yeah, boom lift.

**What's that for? Live-show staging?**

Yeah. I used to do the fireworks for rock concerts - stuff like Bon Jovi, AC/DC - so I needed that. So I had lots of licences, but I always had a passion for cars. I did some amateur tarmac rallying when I was younger, like the Dutton rallies, which are now the Australian Tarmac Challenge. And rallying was just me

going into a corner out of control and out of a corner under control. That was my theory. The first time I got a chance to really get trained properly was the Grand Prix Celebrity Challenge, where you get a week of proper race training. You have to get your CAMS licence to be allowed out on the track. I went all right. I only finished fifth because the other four were out to kill each other. I promised I'd hand the car back straight, which I did. Anyone who's raced a car knows that if you want to race again, you need to either win or hand it back straight. Like any kid in the western suburbs, I'd had my fair share of doing the wrong things in all the right cars at all the wrong times.

**Is there a photo in your family album of you with a massive mullet doing a burnout?**

I object to the word 'mullet' and anyone who's from the western suburbs of Melbourne or anywhere on the eastern seaboard of Australia knows they weren't mullets. It had to be short at the top and long at the back to be a mullet. What the modern generation now call a mullet is what John Farnham had. That wasn't. That was just a blow wave hair-do that had length at the back. If you had walked through Broady back in the Eighties looking like Farnham and said, "What do you think of my mullet?" ...

**...sorry, I just want to get this clear: did you have a mullet?**

According to who?

**Well I'm asking you.**

According to what the kids today would call a mullet, you damn bet I did! (Fat bursts of laughter... then more senseless gawfing.) And... I love it! I love it, but society has suggested I get rid of it.

**I thought you might have kept it somewhere.**

What? The hair?

**Yeah. Like, framed it and put it on your wall at home.**

It's like an old piece of chewie. I'm just not interested really.

**But is there a photo of you doing a burnout?**

I've got photos of me doing donuts and stuff on motorbikes, because I was a big dirt bike rider. Mad for it. I've got a photo of a car of mine that was burnt out...

**Should you talk about this? Isn't the investigation ongoing?**

No, it isn't. Because someone stole my car and burnt the bejesus out of it.

**Did you object on the insurance?**

I did.

**Well, your honour. There seems to be a connection between these two activities...**

No! What are you trying to put in this damn magazine? Who are you? I thought the magazine and the show were one and the same. The TV show has much more respect for the individual.

**What was that story you were telling me about pulling your motorcycle under a fence at a live runway and seeing what it would do?**

This is the problem. I'm being interviewed by people who can drag up stories. Look, all I can say is a motorbike that looked almost identical down to the finest detail...

**...like the number plate...**

...to my Honda CBR 1000, which had four-into-one exhausts and went pretty well, actually. To the untrained eye, you'd swear it was exactly the same bike. And someone who from a distance looks the same height and size as me...

**...and who had the same helmet...**

I did notice one day that this combination did head down the runway at night time at the Point Cook RAAF base. Because if Tom Cruise can do it, so can I. The only thing that was ever a chance of coming up beside me was a Cessna.

**What speed might that mystery rider have been doing?**

I would imagine that bike could do somewhere in the region of 225km/h before he had to hit the brake. The thing that I found interesting was that on racetracks there's always plenty of run-off. But with a runway, there's a certain point at which, if that plane hasn't taken off, it's all over anyway. They don't care. They've got spikes coming out of the boundary fence. The other problem was that at night I couldn't see the end of the runway.

**YOU couldn't?**

No, you've focused on the wrong syll-ABLE. As in, *owe* could not. One could not see the end of the runway.

**I noticed when we were filming the UK special that when it came to the sheep herding, you hopped on the KTM and popped a mono. Now be honest - how close were you to falling on your arse? That would've been the funniest moment of the entire series if you had.**

There was more chance of me stacking that bike than there was of me rousting up those sheep. I probably hadn't been on a decent dirt bike and tried to tear it arse off for probably 10 years. I was riding dirt bikes from the age of 14. I later switched to the dark side, which was road bikes, and it was a different experience. **Doing dumb shit, though, is a rite of passage when you are a) male and b) have a bike or car. On the TV show, I must admit I enjoy driving the dodgy old dumpboxes more than anything else, because it takes me back to the immaturity of my youth.**

That's why I like buying the older cars. I love driving, and the car I have always most enjoyed driving is my EH Holden, because of the feeling I get when I drive that car. And I have to say, it goes like a bag of shit. What it does well is make me feel great, but what it does badly is drive.

**It's all relative, though, isn't it?**

The motoring world has evolved to comfort and reliability, and on a day-to-day basis, I love that. But because I'm in that world now, I love going back to the EH. If it was all that's available, I'd hate it. It's like watching *The Terminator* - it's not a classic, but it's a lot of fun.

**"I'm going to do exactly what Jeremy and Richard and James do: be themselves. They're big shoes to fill, only if you're standing in theirs!"**

The thing is, the best cars to learn in are shitty and old. I started in a paddock in a 350 HQ Statesman. My first car was an FC Holden ute, and I discovered brake fade not long after getting my P plates.

Before turn one.

**As I was backing out of the driveway.**

Those brakes faded on purchase and never came back.

**Look, kids do need good cars with every safety feature you can buy because God knows they'll access every one before they turn 25. But old cars give you a sensation of speed because they have noise, vibration and harshness – the very thing 'serious' motoring journo's moan about. By removing those, you separate yourself from the raw driving experience. Modern cars are almost too smooth and quiet and cocooning, and that's dangerous sometimes.**

That's why modern forms of transport are vehicles, but the older cars are machines.

**Outside of Eric Bana, there don't seem to be many local celebs with a genuine love of cars. Did I hear right that Bryan Brown has a car he's particularly fond of?**

He has a Statesman. I think it's a de Ville. Bryan said to me, "The only reason I still have that car is that I'm waiting for them to build a better one."

**I don't know if you've noticed, but there are a lot of people who reply to blogs on TG.com with plenty of, shall we say, forthright advice about TopGear Australia. And where we should shove it. Regardless, we've been talking lately about how we need to make the show more Australian, without being ocker.**

A lot of people say to me, "Aren't you just copying what the English guys do?" And to that there are two answers: yes. And no. In fact, I am going to do exactly what Jeremy and Richard and James do, and that is they are themselves.

They are big shoes to fill only if you're trying to stand in theirs, but every person fits their own shoes perfectly. I can't be anyone else but myself. If I try to be anyone else, other than the idiot I am, my friends will go, "We like you 'cos you're an idiot, but please don't change that because once you move past that you become a wanker."

**We're going to Series Four, which I'm really stoked about. But given that the producers have stuck with the same three presenters, how can it possibly improve?**

All we can do is go out there and have even more fun than we had in Series Three. And let's face it, we're even better friends now than we were when we first started.



**Really?**

Yes. You, me and Steve got along well from the first day, didn't we?

**Eh?**

But now we have travelled together and played around so much, we're proper mates now.

**Ummm...**

I think that's what will make the biggest

difference: the three of us knowing each other so well now. Most of what we know about each other we like, and the other bits we love giving each other shit about. That's what makes a mate.

**A lot of people have said to me that they thought the safari park story was a set-up. Which you and I know it wasn't.**

I was speaking with one of the zookeepers on the way out and said, "Was that a bit of fun to watch?" And she said, "No, that was terrifying. I was shitting kittens in there. I don't think you realise how close you all were to dying. We'll never let that happen again."

**You look like a chap who enjoys a good crash. What's your best effort?**

I've been in quite a few and I'm proud to say none have really been my fault... if you discount the few when I fell asleep behind the wheel. I once had both sides replaced on a Commodore from two separate accidents and I'd had the car back for three days when I went through an intersection with green lights in my favour and a guy ran the red to my right and T-boned me. Straight back to the panel beater! The bloke who owned the panel shop said, "We love you Shane... shit, you're good for business."

**If you had a pair of scissors and a cable tie, what would be the most complex car repair you reckon you could carry off convincingly?**

I would put my bank manager in a Peol P50 electric car, cable-tie his thumbs to the steering wheel and using the scissors, scratch into the bonnet these words: "PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SET FIRE TO THIS CAR OR PUSH IT OFF A CLIFFE" It's not exactly a repair, but it would be an improvement in so many ways.

**You're doing TopGear Live with Clarkson and May in March in Brissie and Melbourne. When we spent time with Jezza in the UK, I thought he was really friendly and generous and not the intimidating monster you think he is.**

I recently went over and spent some time with the boys in Dublin during the TopGear Festival (see page 112) so I could get an idea of what I will be doing when I'm filling in for Richard out here. I can honestly say they just have a ball with each other and the crowd. It's going to be an exhausting run, though, because we do three shows a day then go out at night and have a few drinks and then by the time we get back to our hotel rooms, the alarm goes off to get back for the show. Ouch! But Jeremy is great. People would be surprised how supportive he has been of us here in Australia and the TV show here. We all take digs at each other on camera, but when the cameras are off... actually, I take that back. He keeps on taking digs when we have stopped filming as well. But how can we argue, Ewen? He paid for our food and grog when we were in the UK. **He did. And I must say that my steak was a little overcooked.**

When someone pays for my food and drink, they are a champion no matter who they are. ☑



Discovery Channel photography crew suddenly got serious



Shane looks like he's about to vomit. He is

**"I've never lost my licence; I knew where it was until the police gave it back"**