

ON SET WITH... Sooty

Sooty celebrates his 65th birthday later this month. Here, the little bear, who was bought on Blackpool's North Pier by Harry Corbett for 7s 6d in 1948, guides us through a typical week on his TV show – with help from his right-hand man Richard Cadell...



3 MONDAY

This morning I'm up bright and early at 6am, and within an hour Richard and I are in make-up at the Pontins Holiday Park in Brean Sands, Somerset, where we shoot most of our series. People often ask me how I've survived in this business for so long and I joke that it's down to good fabric conditioner – and grooming. So the first thing Richard does today is brush my fur. Then I'm fitted for my costume. Today I'm dressed as a clown and I have several stand-by outfits too. Getting smacked in the face with a custard pie is a regular occurrence on Sooty, so I might have to change later...

4 TUESDAY

Today we're filming in the caravan where I live with my friends Sweep and Soo, and I take great delight in 'accidentally' pouring a bowl of custard over Richard's head, something I've been doing since I started on TV on BBC's Talent Night in 1952. We're still using the same routines Harry Corbett involved me in all those years ago, and I think that's the reason I've stayed popular: I'm still the same naughty little scamp, playing tricks and performing magic. These days, however, we make the most of CGI so my tricks go with even more of a bang.

5 WEDNESDAY

We have a very special guest on set today, Caroline Quentin, who's playing a restaurant critic. It's great when guest stars really join in the fun and Caroline is happy to pose for pictures with me, Soo and Sweep [right]. I wonder if she'd mind if I squirted her in the face with my water pistol? Maybe I shouldn't risk it...



6 THURSDAY

There's bad news from London for poor old Richard! ITV bosses tell us a survey has revealed that viewers love seeing Richard suffer, whether it's being covered in custard or dunked in water, so he has a lot more coming his way! We always have to do a risk assessment first though, especially since 'Pizzagate' a couple of years ago, when I accidentally caught Paul Daniels in the eye with a pizza and he had to go to A&E. Today Sweep and I 'accidentally' get a bottle wedged under the wheels of Richard's exercise bike, causing it to break free, and fly out the door into a pond with him still on board!

7 FRIDAY

We use the children holidaying at Brean as extras, and the trick is not to reveal what we're about to do so we can catch their instant reactions – that's why we usually do everything in just one take. We have a couple of my favourite TV characters on board today, The Krankies. Jimmy Krankie is a judge at a dog show and, because of his size, we get laughs from the fact that he's not much taller than some of the Great Danes on show. We also raise a giggle from dunking Richard in baked beans. He really has suffered this week, so I decide to give him the weekend off to recover...

The Sooty Show, weekdays, 9.10am, CITV.

1 Ice-tails

Here's the scoop: the cross between an ice cream and a cocktail is the summer's coolest dessert trend, including delicious concoctions such as the Dark 'n' Stormy – a mixture of rum, lime and ginger.

2 Hostelling

The National Trust says more families are holidaying in its cheap and cheerful bunkhouses – set in glorious countryside – this year instead of heading abroad.

3 Spar prosecco

Cheers! The supermarket's £6 Perleza Brut fizz was praised for its creamy bubbles and hints of peach as it won silver at the International Wine & Spirit Competition.

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1 New Forest ponies

Having roamed free for centuries, they're now in danger as 90 per cent fewer stallions has meant the number of foals born has fallen from 1,000 in 2009 to 600 last year.

2 Married names

One in three wives dislikes their new surname and would have preferred to keep their maiden name, which they felt was a big part of who they were, a survey reveals.

3 High-street jewellers

They've lost their shine, with H Samuel closing more than one store a month for five years and Ernest Jones and Goldsmiths also shutting shops due to online competition.

Julia Bradbury used to whip through life like a tornado and God forbid anybody who tried to slow her down. 'That's what life is about – ringing the changes,' she says. 'You've got to keep moving, keep changing, keep doing what you need to do. I like being independent. I like doing my own thing.' So she did. Then two years ago Julia, 42, became a mum to little Zephyr, named after the Greek god of the gentle west wind. For years she'd been desperate to have a baby but had pretty much given up hope after being diagnosed with endometriosis in her thirties. When she found out she was pregnant she let out a whoop of joy and hasn't stopped grinning since.

The fact she wasn't in 'a relationship' with the baby's father, 54-year-old Irish property developer Gerard Cunningham, didn't concern her. Things, you see, seem to have a way of sorting themselves out for Julia. 'Although Gerry and I had known each other for 20 years, we weren't planning a future together. I wouldn't have described him as my boyfriend,' she says. 'We were just seeing how things went. Then I got pregnant and we moved in together six or seven months later. We rented a house so it wouldn't be his place or mine. It was a case of, "Right, this is where we're going to have a baby and this is where we're going to bring it up." It was the baby house – nobody's territory, which I think was good.

'I'm a commitment-phobe, but somehow having a baby made moving in together seem the right thing to do. There's no better reason, is there? It wasn't necessarily conventional but it did work because I was just so wrapped up in the pregnancy, becoming a mother – all of that excitement. Had it been just moving in I'd have been petrified, but because it was the corner of a jigsaw, it made sense.' Given the way she doesn't stop grinning throughout this interview, it seems to make her very happy too.

This is a softer, more emotionally fleshed-out Julia than the one I've known since her days as Los Angeles correspondent for GMTV in the mid-90s. She was always huge fun, generous too, but as she says herself, 'too selfish and career-minded' for relationships to last. 'Oh, I'd definitely say I'm not easy to live with,' she says. 'I'm strong-willed and opinionated – though I'm not a "crazy woman" – and having Zeph has somehow made me calmer. Gerry and I have always been great friends and

always respected one another. That now puts us in a good place. It works really well. We're dedicated to Zeph. It's about making his environment secure and happy. It's a partnership. I'm just thankful that, at the moment, it's perfect. I feel very lucky... touch wood. I know things move on and bad things can happen: that's life. But the way I tend to think is, "Oh, it'll be fine. It'll be all right."

Julia was 19 and working in her beloved Greek mother Chrissi's fashion business when she first met Gerry at a friend's dinner party. 'We started going out quite soon, and then he was my boyfriend for four or five years. I moved in with him but there were lots of things going on for me at that age. I knew the



Julia with Prince Charles on Countryfile

My miracle baby has been the making of me

Countryfile star Julia Bradbury on how the child she thought she'd never have has changed her whole perspective on life.
By Rebecca Hardy



family business wasn't for me and I needed to find what was going to work for me. I wanted to travel the world, go and explore and do things. I definitely didn't want to get married. I wanted to try to get a job in television.'

Did she break Gerry's heart? 'Probably,' she says with a jolly, who-cares-we're-deliriously-happy-now sort of laugh. Were there other loves? 'Loads,' she says. 'Gerry's had them as well. I fall passionately and heavily, but perhaps not very sensibly. I've left a few broken hearts along the way. I've had my heart broken a few times too, but for me a career was always a necessity. I wanted it to be fulfilling. I wanted the job to be something I was passionate about.'

Which is why we're here. Julia is, of course, best known to millions as the rambling man's hot-buttered crumpet

for her TV roles on the BBC's Countryfile and Wainwright Walks, but she doesn't want to get typecast. So, again, she's ringing the changes with a brand new daytime quiz show Take On The Twisters. The twisters are giant egg-timers that contestants try to keep in play by answering general knowledge questions. Julia is cock-a-hoop to be breaking new ground for women on TV by hosting what she calls 'a shiny floor show'. 'Entertainment shows are called shiny floor shows because they lay down a super-glossy black floor to help reflect the lights and keep it all, well, shiny,' she says. 'There aren't that many women doing it – actually hosting the show rather than being the glamorous assistant. Anne Robinson did it with The Weakest Link, but she was playing a persona. This is more

personality-driven. This is about you. It's exciting to be the ringleader in command of operations. What other women are doing it?'

We think about it. Crikey, she's right. I can't name a single one. 'You see,' she says. 'It's just men. Broadcasters are more careful than ever before to make sure, as a woman, you're given your fair chance, but the fact is there are more male producers, executives and commissioners than there are female. I genuinely think it's still harder for women in this business. I have male

peers who definitely get paid more than me and if you're a strong woman fighting for what you think is right you're seen as slightly stroppy. But

you've just got to get on with it. All I want to do is push myself and push my own boundaries. I'll kick and scream really hard for me, but I'm not kidding myself that I'm doing it for the whole of womankind. I'm just trying to make headway slowly. I'm always frustrated when I'm just in one box. When people say to me, "Oh, you're the outdoorsy girl," I say, "No, actually, what

about the consumer shows I've worked on, like Watchdog?'

Which she did, from 2005 to 2009, and as well as Countryfile and Wainwright Walks, there have been presenting jobs on Top Gear and BBC3's Kill It, Cook It, Eat It. Then there was BBC1's Planet Earth Live last year, and later this month she appears in another brand new consumer health show called Long Live Britain. It's a marvel she found time to give birth, let alone breastfeed. 'Oh, I'm not as ambitious as I was,' she says. 'The most important thing is Zeph. He's changed everything. You lose that edge. My career being the number one priority has gone, and the way I work has changed. I try not to be away from him more than two nights a week, whereas

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TESTING OUR PATIENCE The most boring Ashes batsman of all time? Geoff Boycott faced 8,568 balls in Ashes Tests –

but never hit one of them for six. Let's hope we get a few more than that when this year's Ashes begins on Wednesday