

From top: Surfing in Hawaii, a 1968 Mustang GT 390, Peter Sellers in Dr Strangelove, Aesop's Fables, Abraham Lincoln, the Dallas Cowboys, New Zealand's South Island and Sade

The prized possession you value above all others... The roof of my house in west London. I had to sell my prized £17,000 1968 Mustang GT 390 – like the one from the Steve McQueen film Bullitt – to pay for it. I loved that car, so now I call the roof my Mustang Roof!

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I regret letting key friendships drift because of my dedication to rowing and the Olympics. You can only let people down so many times before they stop bothering.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

I'd wake up with the family [wife, TV presenter Beverley Turner and children, Croyde, eight, Kiki, three, and Trixie, one] on Waimea Bay in Hawaii and have breakfast on the beach, then surf. Then I'd go with mates to watch the Dallas Cowboys play. We'd have beers (and admire the Texan ladies!), then I'd go to a remote part of New Zealand's South Island with Bev. I'd build a shelter and catch crayfish for her to barbecue, because I'm not a great cook. Then we'd watch a film on the beach.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Tuning in to Sky Sports News even though I know that absolutely nothing new will have happened since I watched it 15 minutes earlier!

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Aesop's Fables. I first read them when I was eight and they have stayed with me. They're simple, but work on many levels. I always give a copy as a christening present – with a case of port.

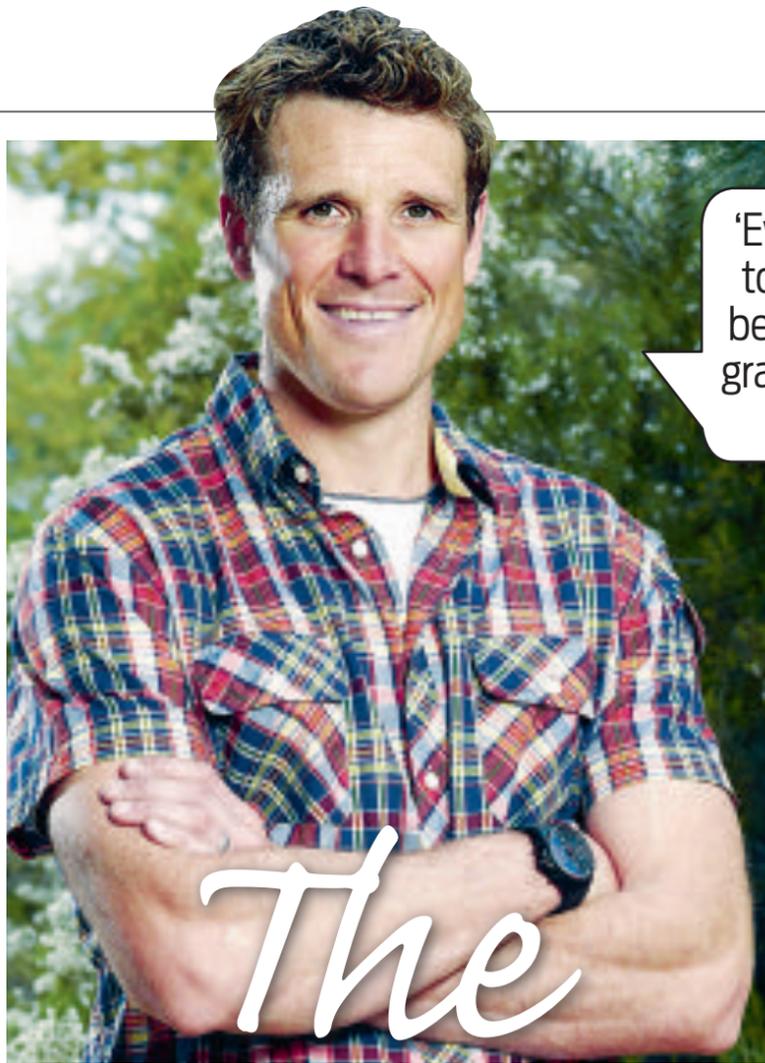
The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd go back in time to be with Hitler in his bunker at the end of WWII and see it all unravel.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Programmed responses said without any real meaning, like 'Have a nice day'. I prefer people to be genuine.

The film you can watch time and time again... Stanley Kubrick's Dr Strangelove, because it's so original and funny. Peter Sellers is hilarious in it.

The person who has influenced you most... My mum Jennie taught me right from wrong and what to fight for.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Abraham Lincoln – he overcame so much and was the most inspirational leader, it's no coincidence that he's the only American president to have his statue in Parliament Square.



'Everybody thinks I went to Oxford or Cambridge because I row. I went to a grammar school and then Reading University'

The event that altered the course of your life and character... The accident was a huge shock and changed the way I view life. [In 2010 James was hit on the head by the wing mirror of a tanker while cycling in Arizona, suffering damage to the brain that still affects him today]. I'm lucky to be alive and value every day much more.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... Maybe I'd kill Hitler while I was invisible, but it would have been better to kill him in 1933 and save 10 million lives.

The song that means most to you... Lovers Rock by Sade. Bev and I walked down the aisle to it in 2002 and it always makes me feel good.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When our daughter Kiki was born at home in 2009. It was particularly poignant because my sister Louise's baby girl Eva had died a year earlier at just a week old. Understandably, Bev was very fearful about the birth, so when Kiki arrived safely it was perfect.

The saddest time that shook your world... When Eva died. She'd suffered asphyxiation in the labour. My sister and her husband were robbed of their child and had to switch the life-support off.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be able to dance with natural rhythm. Whenever I get on the dance floor it's a disaster, with limbs flailing everywhere.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Be honest with yourself and take responsibility for your actions.

The order of service at your funeral... I want to be cremated, but beyond that I don't really care – flush my ashes down the toilet and get on with life!

The way you want to be remembered... I don't expect anyone to remember me for my rowing, but I want to be thought of as a good mate, a loving husband and a great dad.

The Plug... World's Toughest Expeditions with James Cracknell starts tomorrow at 9pm on Discovery Channel. Visit www.jamescracknell.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's Olympic rower James Cracknell

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Be tough on yourself and analyse your own involvement in something before you blame others.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Military and political history. The world can learn lessons from the past – but sadly it doesn't.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... Photos of the first three years of my son's life, which were on a laptop stolen in 2006.

The unending quest that drives you on... To know what I'm doing with my life. Rowing consumed everything and I still haven't worked out who I am.

The poem that touches your soul... I'm not keen on poetry but I love hymns. Morning Has Broken moves me.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I went to Oxford or Cambridge, simply because I row. I went to a grammar school and Reading University.

PS...

Emily Blunt and Ewan McGregor star in feelgood film *Salmon*

Fishing In The Yemen – in cinemas now. Alison Steadman is

back on stage in Michael Frayn's *Here at the Rose* in Kingston.

And Rufus Wainwright's album *Out Of The Game* is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Meet our brilliant new star columnist
- On set with the latest Scandinavian police drama *The Bridge*
- Jamie Oliver makes the most of seasonal greens
- PLUS Don't miss Britain's most detailed TV listings guide