

From top: the Houses of Parliament, a sandcastle, Provence, sharpened pencils, Bob Dylan, Henry VIII, a Japanese guide book and a scene from the film *A Flash Of Genius*

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** My Austin Healey 100/4, which I had in 1968 when I was a student at the Royal College of Art. It was badly engineered and kept breaking down. Repairing it was my first foray into engineering.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** Discover, prove, test, test.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no time travel restrictions...** Breakfast in Provence, Christmas lunch with my family and grandchildren, then tobogganing on the Cotswold hills. Building sandcastles on any sandy equatorial beach, before ending the day reading poems to grandchildren in bed.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Ginger chocolate oat bars from Waitrose.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** My Japanese phrase book. I used it when I went to Japan with the G-Force vacuum cleaner. Technology-savvy, they were the first to license my machine.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd sneak into Westminster and rearrange the ministerial in-trays. Engineering needs to be a bigger part of the national curriculum. A plan to save it would then be at the top of Michael Gove's paper pile.

**The way fame and fortune is changing you, for better and worse...** Helping the Royal College of Art, from which I learnt so much. But I've now lost the anticipation of writing a cheque and wondering whether the bank manager would pay it.

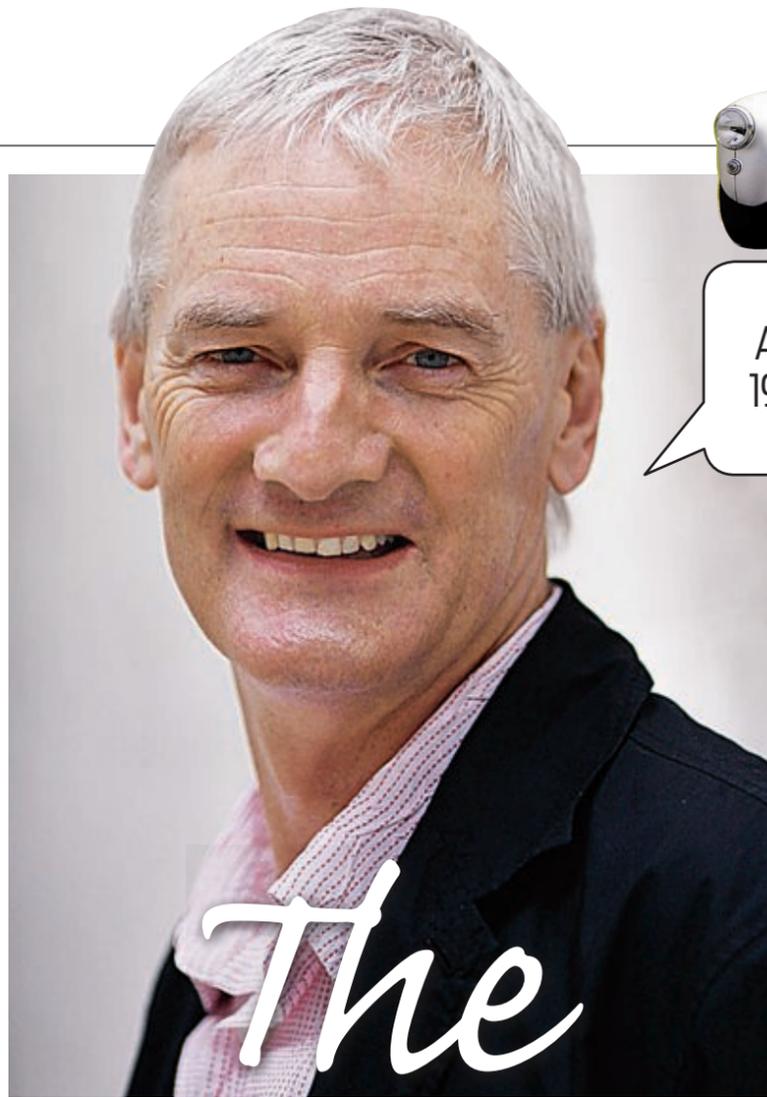
**The film you can watch time and time again...** *Flash Of Genius*. In it Robert Kearns battles against the car giants of Detroit that ripped off his intermittent windscreen wiper invention.

**The person who has influenced you most...** The late entrepreneur and inventor Jeremy Fry. He took a punt on me and gave me my first break,

building a high-speed landing craft. He taught me to stop theorising and worrying, just to get started and build prototypes. I built thousands of them. Oh, and Jeremy taught me to weld.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Henry VIII, for introducing the Patent system to protect inventors. If I were able to meet him I'm

convinced I could help him improve the system further.



Repairing my old Austin Healey 100/4 in 1968 was my first foray into engineering

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm a businessman. God forbid. I'm far happier in a laboratory or workshop, pulling things apart.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** When I was 17, I visited a handlebar-moustached careers advisor at school. He told me to be an estate agent. I've avoided 'experts' ever since.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd use a JCB to drive off with counterfeit products. Copycats and ripping off intellectual property is quite simply theft.

**The song that means most to you...** Bob Dylan's *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right*. I have to think about things a thousand times – 5,127 times to get the vacuum cleaner right.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Aside from anything family-related, the first time I heard someone recommend a Dyson machine – to me.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** The loss of my parents. I was nine when my father Alec died. He was only 40. My mother Mary died aged 55. They were both academics who painted. My father made things in a workshop, taught classics, produced and wrote plays, sailed, played rugby and hockey. He was a real polymath with an enthusiasm for everything.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** The school I wanted to build in Bath. The last government asked me to build it and then laid obstacle after obstacle. One day!

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** We owe it to future generations to leave the world in a better state than how we found it.

**The order of service at your funeral...** Strip body. Remove wiring. Separate components. Recycle.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As a champion of the prosaic.

**The Plug...** The James Dyson Award for inventions is open for entries from 5 April. [www.jamesdysonaward.org](http://www.jamesdysonaward.org) ■

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 the turn of Sir James Dyson*

convicted I could help him improve the system further.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Don't be afraid of failure. If something doesn't work, use what you've learnt to try and try again.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Sharpening pencils using Kenneth Grange's brilliant powered sharpener.

**The prized possession you value above all others...** Half a Mini. For my 60th

birthday, my engineers sliced a cross-section of a Mini – engine included.

**The unqualified regret you wish you could amend...** I failed to safeguard my Ballbarrow idea – I gave the rights to a company I didn't control. I now protect Dyson inventions vigorously.

**The poem that touches your soul...** Eric Idle's *Ants In Their Pants*, about the sex life of ants, makes me smile: 'How does the ant get it on?' Now that's curiosity!

PS...

*Jake Gyllenhaal thrills in new film *Source Code*. See the star pig in musical *Betty Blue Eyes* at London's Novello Theatre. And Queen rock in *Queen 40*, a box set of their first five albums. Follow us on Twitter @weekendmagazine*



**NEXT WEEK**

● The real Hotel Babylon ● Delicious recipes for a cracking Easter ● Monty Don braves blackthorn prickles to make the perfect sloe gin ● **PLUS** Don't miss Britain's biggest and most detailed TV listings guide