

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

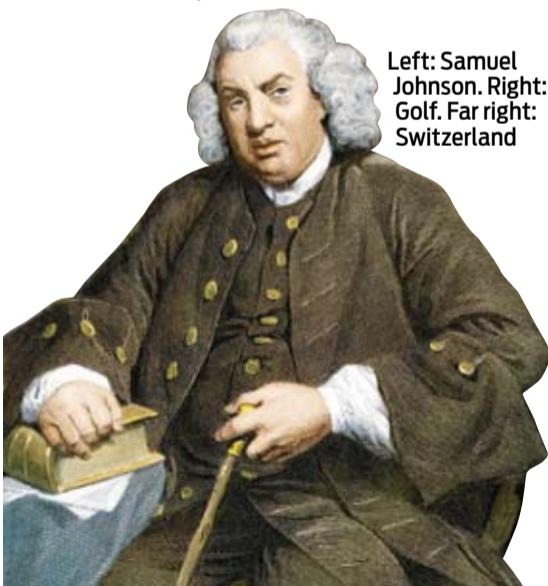
We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: running legend Sir Roger Bannister

The prized possession you value above all others... My lifetime achievement award from the American Academy of Neurology in 2005. I was a neurologist for 40 years and it is quite an accolade to be honoured in that way.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Using my wife Moyra's calligraphy pens. She's an artist and her pens are precious. She quite rightly tells me off!

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The 18th-century writer Samuel Johnson. I've such respect for his achievements and the fine life he led. He struggled with religion for much of his life, so maybe we could discuss that.

Left: Samuel Johnson. Right: Golf. Far right: Switzerland



The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Diseases Of The Heart And Circulation by the doctor Paul Wood. It had a huge impact on my work in neurology.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Never bringing down my golf handicap from 28.

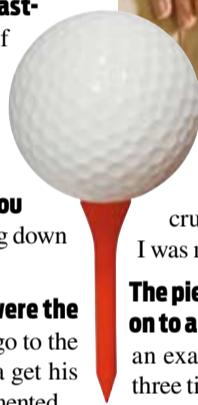
The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd go to the Oval Office and help Obama get his healthcare programme implemented.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... When people are downbeat about the state of the world. I'm 85 and I remain hopeful and optimistic.

The film you can watch time and time again... A Matter Of Life And Death from 1946, which stars David Niven. It's powerful and entertaining.

The person who has influenced you most... Moyra. She's also 85 and we've been married nearly 60 years. She's my most valiant supporter and a wonderful mother to our four children.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People often ask, 'Did you mean to break the four-minute mile?' It makes me laugh because I trained for two years with that sole aim. [Sir Roger ran the first sub-four-minute mile on 6 May 1954.]



The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My right ankle! It was crushed in a car crash in 1975 and I was never able to run again.

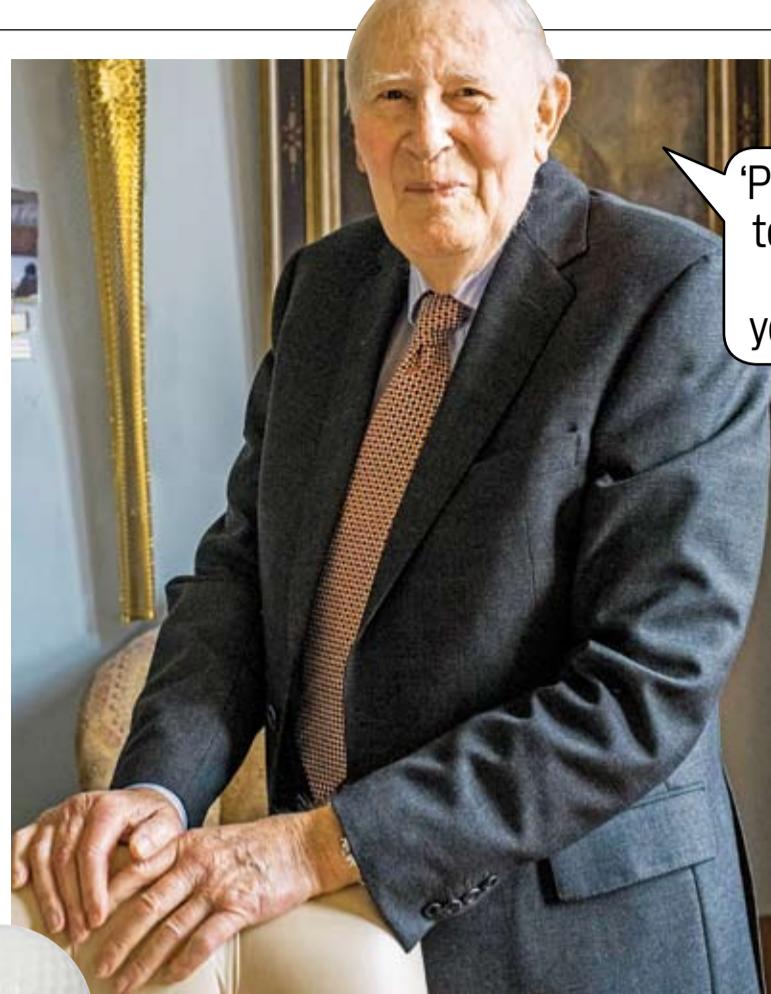
The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... 'When you are facing an exam paper, read every question three times!' When I was 14 I misread a question, which cost me dearly.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I'm fascinated by spies. It's incredible how they can betray the people they love.

The unending quest that drives you on... To remain physically fit for as long as possible. I started showing signs of Parkinson's disease three years ago, but they've been slow to develop.

The poem that touches your soul... Everyone Sang by Siegfried Sassoon. It's about the end of the First World War and is filled with hope.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Coming fourth in the 1,500 metres at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952. I was favourite to win gold and had planned to retire from running, but when I got home I vowed to break the four-minute mile.



'People often ask if I meant to break the four-minute mile. I trained for two years with that sole aim!'

tea with him. Moyra and I would have cocktails on top of the Empire State Building in New York then fly back to London for a performance of The Magic Flute at the Royal Opera House with the entire family. We'd all have dinner during the interval. Moyra and I'd end the night back at home in Oxford.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Breaking the four-minute mile. I always feel that the triumph is shared equally with the two Chrises.

The saddest time that shook your world... The Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. I remember being acutely anxious that the world could end.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To start carving wooden animals again. I took it up three years ago but last year I had an arthritic shoulder replaced and I haven't got the strength back to do it.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Do as you would be done by.

The order of service at your funeral... My daughter Charlotte is an Anglican priest, so she'd conduct the service at St Mary's Church, Oxford. I'd have Fauré's Requiem and Abide With Me. Moyra and I bought a plot in a cemetery north of Oxford five years ago, so we can be buried next to one another.

The way you want to be remembered... Simply with affection.

The Plug... Sir Roger's memoir Twin Tracks is published by The Robson Press, priced £20. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Carey Mulligan and Bill Nighy sizzle in Skylight at Wyndham's Theatre, London. Belle, the true story of a slave's daughter raised by her aristocratic great-uncle, is in cinemas on Friday. And Stockholm, Chrissie Hynde's debut solo album, is out Monday

NEXT WEEK

- Go behind the scenes of comedy Mr Sloane with its star, Nick Frost
- Monty Don on how to grow the tastiest strawberries
- Try Tom Kerridge's recipes for perfect picnic food
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings