

From top: the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Bangkok, a lion, Adolf Hitler, Muhammad Ali, A Tale Of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, Reach For The Sky, the girls from The Only Way Is Essex, rum and raisin ice cream, and Frank Sinatra

The prized possession you value above all others... A Muhammad Ali autograph he gave me after I interviewed him for radio in 1971. He was outrageous and funny, the most fascinating sportsman of all time.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I wish I'd taken up flying lessons when I was given three as a present 20 years ago. What an amazing thing to try, but I was too busy. It's too late now – I'm 70 and too old!

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

I'd wake up with the lady of my life, Rose, at the Shamwari Game Reserve in South Africa and go on a dawn safari. To hear a lion roar at 5am sends a tingle down your spine. We'd have breakfast at the lodge – the mushrooms there are the best I've tasted. We'd spend the rest of the morning on the canals of Venice in a gondola, then go to the Cipriani Hotel for a glass of champagne. Lunch would be fresh fish and lobster at a beach bar we love in Phuket. I'd have a swim in the Andaman Sea after lunch, followed by a massage on the beach. We'd pop back to London for tea at The Ritz, then straight back to Thailand for dinner at the Mandarin Oriental in Bangkok. I'd have Pad Thai with grilled river prawns and a nice chilled bottle of Sancerre, then I'd close the day with an Irish whiskey or two in the Bamboo Bar at the hotel.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Rum and raisin ice cream!

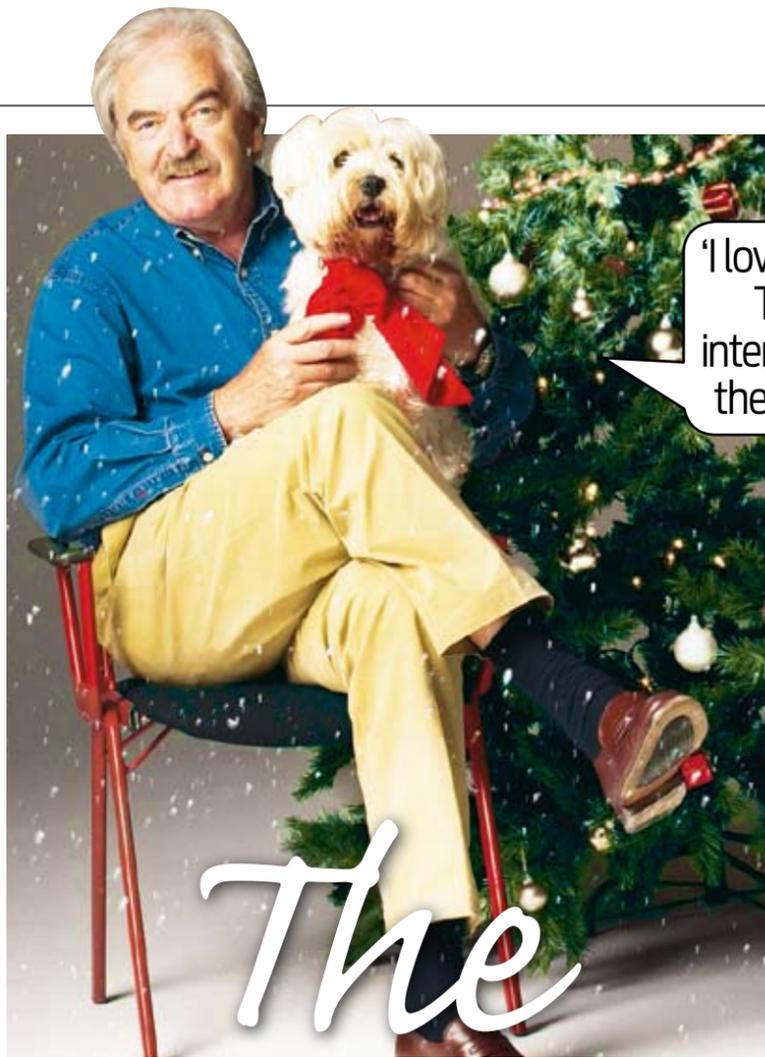
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... A Tale Of Two Cities by Dickens. It's the story of ultimate sacrifice and reminds me there are greater things in life than money and a career.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd spend a day alongside North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un to assess just how dangerous his country is to the world.

The pet hate that always gets your back up... Waiting at the traffic lights when some dope pulls up with music blaring.

The film you can watch time and time again... Reach For The Sky from 1956 with Kenneth Moore as war hero Douglas Bader. I went to see it with my dad when I was 14 and it never fails to make me cry.

The person who has influenced you most... My grandfather Packo Malone. He taught me manners and how to stand up for myself and for what I believe in.



'I love The Only Way Is Essex. The people in it get so intense about nonsense, and the girls are nice to look at!'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: TV and radio presenter Des Lynam

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...

Adolf Hitler. I'd like to find out how he influenced so many intelligent people.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Have the courage of your own convictions.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... The Only Way Is Essex! I love the way the people in it get so intense about such trivial nonsense. And the girls are nice to look at!

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... Our West Highland Terrier, Daisy (above). She died two years ago and we still miss her.

The unending quest that drives you on... To be at peace with getting old.

The poem that touches your soul... My dad told me to read Kipling's If when I was 14 and it has influenced me ever since. That poem teaches you to be true to yourself and always hold your head up high.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People assume I'm a middle-class Englishman, but I'm really an Irishman from a working-class background. Both my parents were nurses who came over from Ireland just before the war.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting a job covering sport on BBC local radio in Brighton when I was 25. Until then, I'd been at Cornhill Insurance for six years and I hated it. I gave up my career for my hobby and eventually my hobby became my career.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd raid Tony Blair's bank accounts and spread the cash among families and soldiers who have suffered in the Iraq war.

The song that means most to you... Make Someone Happy by Jimmy Durante. It reminds me of meeting Rose in 1982.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Christmas 1952. I was ten and my parents gave me my first bike, a Raleigh. That moment was ecstasy.

The saddest time that shook your world... The death of my mother, Trudie, following a brain haemorrhage when she was 53. I was 24 and until then I'd never seen my dad cry.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To finish the novel I started writing five years ago.

The philosophy that underpins your life... If you're going through hell, keep going – but I nicked it from Churchill!

The order of service at your funeral... I'd like some bright music like That's Life by Frank Sinatra. I live by the sea on the South Coast, so I want my ashes scattered on the water. I hope there'll be a big wake with an abundance of drink.

The way you want to be remembered... As not a bad lad with a good sense of humour, and as a decent broadcaster.

The Plug... Touchline Tales, a selection from my Radio 4 series with Christopher Matthew, is available on CD and to download from www.audiogo.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Hayley Atwell teams up with Charlotte Rampling in British thriller I, Anna – in cinemas Friday. Simon Russell Beale stars in Privates On Parade at London's Noël Coward Theatre. And Jools Holland's new album, The Golden Age Of Song, is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Behind the scenes at Santa School – but who'll get the sack?
- More festive Mary Berry favourites
- How to make your own Christmas wreath
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings