

theweekender

■ The Spalls keep it in the family with Forster tale
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GARDENING OUTDOORS NOSTALGIA WEEKEND TV

THE ICE CREAM MAN MELTS HEARTS

SANDRA DICK

HE'S shared a sticky ice-cream moment with a scantily clad Elizabeth Hurley and a movie set with typically English actor Robert Hardy. He's captured Edinburgh's skyline in oils, sailed through a tough masters degree and excelled in sport.

With a CV that reads like a cross between Action Man, Tom Cruise and Indiana Jones, talents ranging from art to archaeology, scriptwriting to pentathlons, skiing, sprinting and plus a deep rooted romantic streak, Dalkeith-born actor Craig Henderson sounds like the ideal lead man.

Can one person really be so perfect?

"I can't fix cars - I'm really rubbish and I don't know where to start with an engine," he insists,

"Everyone wants me to say that Liz was an utter diva and that she was horrible but, honestly, she was really nice"

modestly denying any suggestions that there's clearly nothing he can't do. "Oh, and I've a deathly fear of needles."

Changing the alternator may be beyond him, giving blood just might bring him to his knees, yet neither has so far stopped his gradual progression - despite a wealth of career options - into the world of movies and acting.

For although his chiselled, brooding good looks might not - so far - have made him instantly recognised on the streets of his home town, there can't be that many actors can boast of being currently on screen in around 30 countries.

"Mind you, those appearances do range from advertising beer to contact lenses," he says with a self-

deprecating laugh. "I'll do just about anything if it means I get to work."

One really tough job offer must have been the call from the Magnum ice cream team who just happened to need a suitably handsome 'lead' man to catch Elizabeth Hurley's eye.

The advert - in which Hugh Grant's ex sashays towards Craig as he lounges by a pool in the shimmering heat of a Turkish summer, only to snatch a lingering bite or two from his choc ice - has never been aired in this country, but it's made Craig the object of many a red-blooded chap's envy from Australia to Mexico. As jobs go, it's surely one of the better ones.

"Everyone wants me to say that she was an utter diva and that she was horrible but honestly, she was really nice," he grins. "She was really professional and clearly a conscientious mother. I've kept in touch - well okay, I've kept in touch with her nanny and her PA."

It's rather ironic, perhaps, that it's the advert - something of a mega production that required 150 extras and more than 60 crew - which has catapulted movie man Craig to the widest recognition. Particularly when he has three well-received movies under his belt, a self-generated script to take to film bosses in LA in the next few weeks and a critically acclaimed performance in an award-winning play to add to that already bulky CV.

Today he is fitting in a chat before preparing a video shoot linked to the new DVD launch of Making Waves, a quirky romantic comedy in which he appears



HAMMING IT UP: Dalkeith-born actor Craig Henderson, pictured with co-star Suzie Benton, plays a radio enthusiast leading a double life in quirky rom-com Making Waves

Archaeology fan Craig carves out a big future

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alongside All Creatures Great and Small star Robert Hardy in a story of a disparate group of ham-radio enthusiasts.

Described as a cross between Amelie and Notting Hill, the story revolves around how each one dramatically enhances their otherwise dull lives by creating exciting personas on air. Each imagines their paths will never cross - until inevitably and bizarrely they do.

"Craig walked into the audition and we knew he was perfect for the role," says producer David Burns, who auditioned Craig with the film's writer and director, Nik van Pallandt. "There's just something about the guy - the fact that he's so much fun to work with is just an added bonus. He's got the movie star good looks but at the same time has an everyman quality that means people can identify with him. That's very rare to find in an actor."

Words of praise indeed, particularly when accompanied by reviews which have likened 31-year-old Craig to a British Tom Cruise, and acclaimed his "passionate" theatre performances that left his audience breathless. All of which, combined with his academic background in Ancient History and

Archaeology, sporting prowess and creative talents, and chances are Craig's future doesn't rest simply in advertising choc ices.

He was born in Dalkeith, yet Craig barely has a hint of a Scottish accent thanks to a nomadic childhood which saw his parents George and Noreen Smeal - he uses his more Scottish sounding middle name as his surname for work - travel the length and breadth of Britain following work.

"I don't sound Scottish until I have had copious amounts of alcohol, then it all comes out. All my relatives are Scottish"

His father ran a shop then carved a successful career in the world of finance which sent the family around Britain: Hertfordshire, Northumberland, London and Hampshire. His mum, meanwhile, was raised in a now long gone stretch of Union Place - appropriately, perhaps for Craig, in the shadow of the Playhouse.

A little bit of research into the family name has revealed he can

claim to be a member of the Clan Murray, entitling him to wear a choice of around five tartans - and he does with pride.

"I don't sound Scottish until I have had copious amounts of alcohol, then it all comes out," he smiles. "All my relatives are Scottish, they all have good Scottish accents and I'm back up a lot - it is the place I regard as 'home' and it's why I chose to go to Edinburgh University over Cambridge."

He settled back in the city for four years - "I was reconnecting with my roots," he explains - while he studied courses in Latin, ancient history, classical art and archaeology, finally emerging with his MA (Hons), winning two academic scholarships and competing on the university sprint team in the process.

His time in the city wasn't wasted: he perfected his skill as a marksman, learned to ski and perched by the ramparts of Edinburgh Castle and carefully completed another striking landscape image of the city - painting is just another string to his bow.

All those natural abilities meant he was stuck for choice when it came to picking his career path. "I did think about archaeology,



TUNING IN: Craig as ham radio fan Robert in Making Waves

about joining the Army and about pursuing art. But I found painting a rather lonely occupation, I couldn't deny that my real interest was in becoming an actor.

"I'm inspired by great figures in ancient history," he continues. "Had I not studied the likes of Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great, I would not have had the

insight or honesty to sit down and think of what I really wanted to do."

The choice of acting didn't go down terribly well with his father initially but that has now changed. "As with any parents, they were scared for my future. Then when people in his office started to come to work saying they had seen me

on television or on a film, he began to change. He saw the preview screening of Making Waves, with me and Robert Hardy, and said later he had sat through it all, not wanting it to end. Now he's my biggest fan."

With a sister, Natalie, settled into family life in Lincoln with two children, and his own personal life ticking along nicely with partner Jackie, a high flying corporate coach, all he needs to make life complete is that big movie breakthrough. Could Hollywood beckon sooner rather than later?

Earlier this year he came within inches of securing a part in an American detective series only to be scuppered by a work permit blip. Undeterred, he heads over the Atlantic early next year with a script he penned himself - The Price of Life, a hard-hitting car thriller with an intriguing "human" twist which has attracted Hollywood interest.

Alongside that is a string of other projects, art commissions and ideas to formulate while he looks forward to Christmas and Hogmanay in Edinburgh where he can mingle with the crowds, unnoticed. So what does he hope the future holds?

"I suppose what I'd like is the chance to work in America and to keep things going here too - the way the likes of Brian Cox and Ralph Fiennes have succeeded in doing," he nods.

"I've got to admit, I quite like the idea of being in America, flying the flag for Scotland."

■ Making Waves, starring Craig Henderson and Robert Hardy, is available now on DVD.
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