

A series of political 'scalps' has led Nick Ferrari to be crowned the new king of the trip-wire interview.

NICK Ferrari denies he's had a mid-life crisis despite driving a white Jaguar F-type, having a full set of capped teeth, a wheat-free diet and a girlfriend 15 years his junior ("Clare, without an i"). But professionally, at least, we agree that he is "in a good place".

Confrontational, me? I just ask basic questions

Charlotte Edwardes Interviewer of the Year



His LBC weekday radio show (7am-10am) has record audience figures (1.1m a week) and you can't get in a cab or walk near a building site without hearing the rolling confidence of his Clarksnesque delivery. He's the king of punchy tabloid slogans and trip-wire political interviews.

We've met in his LBC radio studio. The soundproofing has a strange compressing effect on my eardrums, as if post-explosion. And perhaps that's apt given Ferrari's recent run of bomb-drop interviews. It was here that shadow home secretary Diane Abbott declared Labour would employ 100,000 new police officers for £300,000 (a salary of £30 a year), a muddle she corrected to £80 million (still only £8,000 a year).

Shadow education secretary Angela Rayner got her knickers in a twist about class sizes, and Michael Gove, the Con-

servative candidate for Surrey Heath, came a cropper when he cited the fee a company has to pay to employ a non-British worker as £2,000 when it is actually £1,000.

"In fairness it was not his policy," Ferrari, 58, says of Gove. "The others were in a more difficult position because it's clearly the shadow home secretary's job to know about police officers, and the shadow education secretary's job to know about schools."

But it was here, too, that Natalie Bennett, former leader of the Greens, had her famous "brain fade" moment, sug-

gesting that 500,000 new houses would cost £2.7 billion. Ferrari asked if they'd be made of plywood.

Politicians now arrive with crib sheets listing the price of bread, milk, margarine and the No 1 in the charts, among other things. Is he as well briefed? "You wouldn't have caught me out - I was 2p out on the price of milk and on the money with a Tiger loaf. Remember, I don't actually eat bread, but as the children stayed with me when I divorced, I've been doing the shopping for more than 10 years!"

Ferrari insists there's no deliberate kill strategy. "I wish I could pretend it was hours of intensive research and I sit up all night with bar charts and graphs. I come in, sometimes quite late before the show starts, and I just ask, Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?"

Journalism 101? "Exactly. I don't necessarily do that much really ugly, confrontational stuff. I would much rather ask them the most basic questions and see how they fare." But he's aware what makes good radio. "Oh yes."

Praise has been effusive. Tony Parsons wrote that journalists once admired Jeremy Paxman but "the journalistic star of this election is Nick Ferrari".

Whether that's true or not (Ferrari was "hugely flattered"), he has made an impact as a political interviewer at a time when politics seems to be the new showbiz - which he specialised in as a former editor of Bizarre on The Sun.

He describes the Abbott and Rayner interviews as "Labour scalps" or "hits". "Acutely aware" of political balance, he says there was "pressure to land a journalistic blow on the Prime Minister" too.

But Theresa May was too well versed on her figures. He recalls their exchange word-for-word with fondness. She was "charming", "determined", "focused" and "probably the hardest-working Prime Minister we've ever had".

It helps, he says, that "she doesn't have any children. Which is really unfortunate, but [it means] she can really apply herself." Realising a potential landmine here, he does a quick back-pedal: "Not that - I need to be careful now - women who have children can't."

"But for Mrs May politics isn't a job, it's in her DNA. This is a woman who on a Sunday, I understand, goes to church, has a nice Sunday lunch with her husband, and then will go out leafleting in neighbouring constituencies even when elections aren't on."

Being Right-wing makes Ferrari's job far easier, he believes, because, "Right-wing opinions are more likely to get a reaction. If you're on the Left you say 'on the one hand we could do this, but on the other hand...' [If you're] Right wing you can be more dictatorial."

For instance, he once described prisons as holiday camps. "Do I think Belmarsh is like Butlin's? No. But the shorthand is like a tabloid headline, it allows the listener to get the story instantly in six words. Boom!"

PERHAPS this is why "Mr Corbyn", as he calls the Labour leader, has repeatedly refused to come on. "But we're hoping that will change," Ferrari adds. He'd also like to interview Donald Trump. (Has he asked fellow LBC host Nigel Farage to introduce him? "That's a brilliant idea, I'll text him now.")

He would ask Emmanuel Macron, the new President of France, whether "he is allowed to stay up late on school nights" (he mansplains that Macron's wife Brigitte is much older as well as being his former teacher).

In the office he is "demanding". Does he have a temper? "Nooooooo. Yes. A bit. If it gets beyond the 8.30 news or I haven't had my scrambled eggs by 8.45 that might start to get ugly."

He sticks his fingers in his ears if the team tells him something he doesn't want to hear - literally. "It's my way of saying, 'Just make it happen'," he says. LBC employs Katie Hopkins as well



Shock jock: LBC radio host Nick Ferrari attracts an audience of 1.1 million a week

Here, the LBC host talks sex, scandal and the price of milk

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as Farage. Ferrari says he likes them both. Hopkins is "a force" with whom, "I have never had lunch"; while the former Ukip leader is a "friend" with whom lunch is an event.

"Aaah, tremendous," he says of Farage's capacity for drink. "A pre-lunch drink with most people is a gin and tonic. I did you not, a pre-lunch drink was three pints for him. I did two Bloody Marys. And he's absolutely compos mentis."

The restaurant of a pub near Westminster was "cleared" while they ate so that Farage could "smoke between courses" (he can't recall the name of the place). "We sat by an open window. There were no other diners because, of course, it's illegal to do that. And I hand him the wine list and I say, 'I imagine you want to go for New World wines, don't you?'"

"And he takes the wine list and says," - here Ferrari puts on a Farage voice, which sounds unintentionally Alan Partridge - "Oh no, no, no. When it comes to wines I am positively European." So it's an absolute joy to have lunch with him." Ferrari paid, though. "Undoubtedly quite a bit, but not as much as a night out gambling with Wayne Rooney."

Ferrari was steeped in news from childhood. His father Lino started the Ferrari Press Agency and later worked at The Mirror as the night news editor. Ferrari, the youngest of three boys, remembers the stack of papers at the end of his bed when he woke up. He listened in awe at his father's dinner parties, as characters regaled the wilder stories they "couldn't even print".

And then there was the humour. He wheezes his way through Fleet Street stories with delight as fresh as the day they happened. One involves an "underperforming executive" at The Sun who returned from lunch to find his desk, chair and filing cabinet set up in the lift to teach him a lesson. "He had to spend the afternoon going up and down."

Later - following news that a man had been jailed for impersonating doctors - Ferrari was ordered to, "Get a white coat, a stethoscope and a clipboard and walk around hospitals".

"And I did. This woman stopped me: 'I have been waiting for five hours about my sprained wrist. Doctor, all I need to know is, can I go home?'" I said, 'Yeah, you'll be fine. Off you go.'"

Most "fun" was working at Lve TV with Kelvin MacKenzie, a short-lived enterprise that later became a porn channel.

Ferrari had his share of the output: a dwarf weatherman who bounced on a trampoline. "Rusty Goffe. Great bloke. That was my idea." He is also "bloody

proud" of topless darts, Tiffany's Big City Tips (Tiffany Bannister, a model, delivering the financial news while stripping to her underwear).

Is it true that Julia Bradbury was "strong armed" (her words) by him to review sex toys on The Sex Show? "Yeah, probably. What's wrong with that?"

MacKenzie and he are still close. He describes his former editor's recent sacking from The Sun after he compared Everton footballer Ross Barkley, who has Nigerian heritage, to a "gorilla at the zoo", as "terribly unfortunate. Bad luck." They've spoken: MacKenzie is "Absolutely fine. He's Kelvin." For a hardened newshound, Ferrari

can be remarkably coy. He's divorced ("she stopped seeing the funny side") with two adult sons. For a while in interviews he refused to give his age. He's shy about his "partner", initially only revealing that "she works here". Eventually he says: "I don't know why I'm being such an arse. Her name is Clare Patterson."

His political "scalps" have been numbers-based. Is he a maths whizz? "My school contacted me saying: 'Marvelous that you're getting so much recognition. We'd like to tweet your [maths] teacher's name.' I texted back: 'Can't remember his name, he was bloody hopeless. I got a D. So bugger off.'" @chedwardes

A haunting return to Lynch's Twin Peaks

DIANE, I'm watching Twin Peaks: The Return and, even amid a cacophony of expectations, it has lost none of its capacity to unsettle.

David Lynch and Mark Frost's transcendental murder mystery ran for 30 episodes in 1990-91, causing TV audiences nightmares on both sides of the Atlantic. Of the choice exhibits on display last night, I think my favourite would have to be a pulsating organ resembling a testicle with a mouth perched on the top of a tree branch saying: "253. Time and time again. Bob. Bob. Bob. Go now! Go now!"

The first two hours of the 18-hour revival also provided us with a jet-black man levitating in a prison cell; a sinister Ace of Spades; and a cautionary image of what might happen if you have sex at work.

The locale of Twin Peaks - the Pacific Northwest mill town devastated by the murder of schoolgirl Laura Palmer - was glimpsed only in a few scenes. Instead, Lynch offered a dark and multi-stranded narrative, a series of cryptic clues ("430"; "Richard and Linda"; the secretary's car), a growling soundtrack and the sure touch of one of Hollywood's truest auteurs.

Much of the action takes place at the Red Room, the velvet-curtained purgatory where the soul of FBI Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) was trapped at the end of the second season, his body possessed by the demon spirit Bob. We learn that the "evil" Cooper is due back to the Black Lodge soon.

Then we have a strand in a New York tower block, where a college student (Ben Rosenfield) is being paid by a "mysterious billionaire" to monitor a creepy glass box. There's a cutaway to Las Vegas, too, where a Mr Todd (Patrick Fischler) informs his young associate: "You better hope you never get involved with someone like him."

But the most Lynchian happenings take place in Buckhorn, South Dakota,



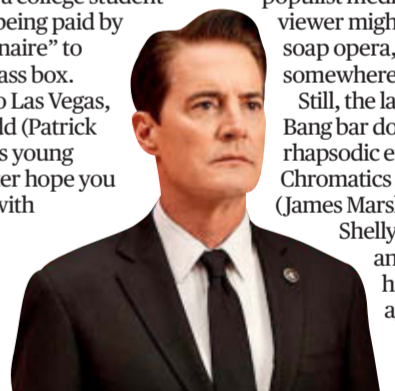
Diner drama: Shelly and Norma are still serving up a damn fine cup of coffee

where the police are investigating the murder of a librarian, beheaded in bed. The evidence fingers the local high-school principal (Matthew Lillard). Meanwhile, the evil Cooper is at large nearby, with a striking new look: long hair, black leather jacket, a snake-print shirt.

One question hanging over the revival was: would Twin Peaks still seem special now that so many shows have been born in its image? There are echoes of The Bridge and Stranger Things. But these are not so much borrowings as I'll-have-that-backs, and Lynch is too distinctive a director ever to seem anything other than himself.

More of its time is the emphasis on sexualised violence. In the original, Lynch didn't linger over the brutality of Palmer's murder but let you feel its effect through the emotions of her friends and family. Lynch now has more control. Perhaps inevitably, what's sacrificed is the magic of TV as populist medium, where a random viewer might tune in hoping for a soap opera, only to be taken somewhere else entirely.

Still, the last scene at the Bang Bang bar does locate that note of rhapsodic emotion. The Chromatics sing Shadow, James (James Marshall) makes eyes at Shelly (Mädchen Amick), and you're only too happy to be haunted again.



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