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The Man In The White Suit: The Stig, Le Mans, The Fast Lane And Me



Synopsis

The Stig gets his kit off and reveals how he came to be Top Gear's iconic racing driver and so much more - including what it's like to thrash an Aston Martin DBS, train for the Army and face the terror of Jeremy Clarkson's underwear. When the Black Stig disappeared off the end of an aircraft carrier in 2003, we were introduced to The White Stig. Faster. Stranger. Harder to keep clean. And ever since, millions have wondered who is The Man in the White Suit? They're about to find out. Ben Collins caught the car the bug young, kicking his dad's boss in the balls for not giving him a company Jag. This was the attitude that eventually led him to spend seven years sharing a cabin with Jeremy Clarkson's underwear, James May's PhD thesis and Richard Hammond's hairspray. Because he is The Stig. Now he tells all about life inside the iconic white helmet. What it's like to guide a blind ex-RAF officer around the Top Gear track; pit a drug dealer's Mitsubishi Evo against a Trojan tank; set a Vauxhall Monaro against Chloe the dancing Ninja; and race double-decker Routemasters against bendy buses. Not to mention all the inside stuff on how the show's amazing driving sequences are made. He also reveals how he got to be there - setting a Dunsfold lap time faster than Michael Schumacher's. Breaking records with the best of the best at Daytona and Le Mans. It's an awesome story, told by an amazing man.

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Customer Reviews

This is a good book if you're a Top Gear fan or a fan of racing memoirs. Collins' writes with a nice humor and his life is interesting enough to merit a book. The only issue I have is that every other chapter skipped back and forth between his time as The Stig with Top Gear and his more normal life of his childhood, being in the army, his family, and his racing and stunt driving career. This isn't enough to dislike the book, in my opinion. I have two degrees in English and I thought it was better written than a lot of other things I've read recently, but perhaps I'm biased based on how much I love Top Gear. Like I said, I enjoyed the humor of his stories and his writing "voice." I read where some people thought his voice was a bit egotistical or cocky... he's a racing driver, and from what I've seen of racing drivers, he's on the humble side, so this aspect did not bother me. If you like Top Gear, you'll probably like this book as well. It gives an interesting insight and even if you're not a fan of Collins, it's fun to play Devil's Advocate either way!

The Collins book is surprisingly entertaining, as it details not only the role of the Stig, but the life of a man who came late to racing and struggled to make a career of it in a field that does not always reward the gifted, which he truly is. Collins appraises himself honestly and we learn that his television work, movie stunts, military service etc. are all pursued in aid of supporting himself while waiting for his next opportunity to race. The Top Gear sequences are very entertaining and, sometimes, laugh-out-loud funny. He goes to great lengths to credit the creativity of the staff, camera men and presenters, who did so much to create this phenomenal series. His struggles to achieve a place in the elite military unit he has chosen are truly epic and described in gritty detail, but again, with no self-pity. The man's relationship with his father is another welcome human touch, which will have many nodding their heads in recognition of the complexities of the dealings of men in families. I enjoyed this book and recommend it.

Great book! I couldn't get enough of it. I read it carefully as if it were a textbook. Ben is really instructive in performance driving and made me feel like now I really understand what it's like to race professionally and stunt-drive. A highly-recommended book!

The Man in the White SuitI have been an avid fan of Top Gear since I first saw an episode a few years ago. Fifth Gear, albeit a similar program, was never quite as entertaining as Top Gear mainly

because of the chemistry between the presenters and because Top Gear is more focused on entertainment. Ben Collins' book is not just an autobiography, but also a behind the scenes look at Top Gear. As I suspected, Top Gear is more about entertaining the audience than a factual car review show. Ben Collins revealed that a lot of the driving sequences, such as the Corvette and Fiesta duel in the mall, was mainly action sequences taken in piece meal with the presenter driving sequences cut/pasted into the whole affair to make them look good. I understand that there are a lot of people there heavily criticizing Ben for leaving Top Gear and the "best job in the world", but I read this book and reviewed it objectively as possible even though I am a Top Gear fan and gearhead/petrol head. As an example of how Top Gear's final production sequences are aimed at entertainment, Ben Collins said in a South African interview after the release of his book that out of the 3 presenters, the best driver was James May. The reason is that May has an engineering background and is more sorted out. In the book, Collins described May as always pretending to be a poor driver to provide some hint of comic relief. In stark contrast, Fifth Gear is too heavy on professional drivers. I've seen episodes where Jason Plato, Tiff Needell, Ben Collins, and Victoria Butler-Henderson bored me to sleep because there wasn't any "cocking about" or entertainment - it was too factual and precise. So let's start from the beginning. Ben is a well-articulated speaker and writer. From his presenter segments on the latest season of Fifth Gear to his interviews, he is a knowledgeable and well-spoken individual. His description of vehicle dynamics is almost on-par with some of literature's greatest masterpieces. His line-by-line recital of track experiences and races is not only riveting, but also very descriptive. As a reader, I could visualize what was happening at the track. It helped that I watched some of the episodes (e.g., Top Gear 24-hour British touring car race at Silverstone with the diesel BMW) but his writing took that experience to another level. Some examples of his story telling technique are exhibited in his driving role for Ascari at Le Mans and Catalunya, as well as his military training. His writing is easy to understand, and although I have never met him in person, his ability to describe events would make him an outstanding instructor. Based on some of the comments and feedback drivers have made about Ben, it appears this is the case. I also learned something technical and useful - I've wondered why a lot of the open wheel racers tended to pump their brakes or jab at them periodically. Page 34 describes how brake pads could be knocked farther away from the discs while driving over kerbs, causing excessive pedal travel especially when the fluid could be hot - thus requiring a periodic jab or pump to seat the pads. Ben Collins did not start driving or riding motorcycles before he could walk, unlike famous Formula 1 and MotoGP riders (such as Valentino Rossi, Michael Schumacher, or Jorge Lorenzo). Ben actually started driving or rather competitively driving at 18. The fact he started at such an "old

age" and the level he has achieved nearly 20 years later gives hope to all and is a testament that one could in fact start later and attain a level of success. The most controversial aspect of this book and Ben's stint at Top Gear was how he revealed himself to be the second Stig. Many, including the BBC, argue that the Stig was meant to be anonymous and to present a sense of mystique and entertainment to the show. However, as Ben mentions in the book, he was close to being discovered due to extensive digging by journalists. Some of the other racers, like Mark Webber, already knew it was Ben Collins but didn't reveal the secret. As a Top Gear fan, I had seen the YouTube videos where fans did comparisons of the Stig with Ben Collins about a year before this book was published. Honestly, I didn't care too much either way. The Stig was part of the entertainment, but in the same sense having a new Stig would keep the mystique going and present something fresh to Top Gear. It will keep the viewers guessing about the new Stig, and possibly draw more viewers. It is a win/win situation. I hear lots of rumors about Sabine Schmitz being Stig's German Cousin or even perhaps the new Stig. It's things like this that can draw viewers back to the show. Based on the reasons Ben gave for considering leaving Top Gear, I don't blame him. Much of his driving is displayed publically as The Stig, but he can't use that on his resume. He needs to eat, and his raw talent would go to waste as a side act on Top Gear. He mentions numerous times how he wishes to race professionally. His job as a stunt driver seems to be going well. I saw some YouTube videos of him on the set of the new Batman movie (Dark Knight Rises). His role as the Stig obviously opened doors, and from what I recall he was able to leave on amicable terms with the presenters according to the book. Something must have changed during the time between the announcement of the book and the BBC's lawsuit. From my perspective, Ben Collins is a knowledgeable and well-articulated professional driver that exemplifies what one could achieve with mental focus and energy. I highly recommend this book to any gearhead/petrol-head that has enjoyed Top Gear and is interested in cars. Overall: 5/5 stars, highly recommended

You would not expect the utterly silent Stig to be a good writer, but you would be surprised. Ben's writing is clear and consistent. He is an excellent story teller, and has lots of great stories to tell. It has lots of great details behind Top Gear that add some great context to a lot of the better moments. Ben writes in perfect detail, providing just enough technicality to keep car savvy readers engaged, without reading like a tech manual. While recounting very memorable races, and periods in his life outside of Top Gear, you really get a sense of the person, and not just a semi-sentient suit. If Ben comes to the states, he should email me. I will buy him many beers.

The book is an easy read. Very enjoyable. The bonus! I am, or was a Top Gear fan. While Ben Collins doesn't go into the ins and outs of what happened during the time that he left Top Gear, and immediately afterwards, not once during the book does he say anything negative about the Top Gear presenters or the Top Gear team. Quite the opposite in fact! I recall that just after Ben Collins left Top Gear, particularly one of the presenters "had a go at him" under a Top Gear special in America. I feel that Ben Collins showed class in being very positive about his time in Top Gear, and gives a good explanation as to why he chose to move on. Enjoyable book. Well worth a read.

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