



Dom Joly

TV's prankster and star of *The Complainers* has taken to country life like a duck to water. Hunting, shooting, polo? Bring it on, he says. By **Charlotte Reather**. Photograph by **Charles Sainsbury-Plaice**

I call the photographer with directions to Dom Joly's house situated in the Coln Valley in Gloucestershire. "Just look for a massive Norman arch!" I shout into the phone, reminiscent of Joly's enormous mobile phone sketch from the hugely successful *Trigger Happy TV* series. "A massive Norman arch with mock baronial doors," Joly adds with a wry grin. He hands me a frothy coffee he's just made. "A latte. Not very country, is it?" he says almost apologetically.

We move to the sitting-room. I stroke and play with his dogs – a black lab called Huxley and Oscar, a flatcoat retriever. He seems genuinely pleased I'm making a fuss over them. "Huxley's really bright. He's won awards. When we first moved up here he won best labrador in the village dog show; the locals were really peed off!"

Joly's move to the countryside happened rather by chance. "In 2003 we were renovating our house in Notting Hill. I thought, instead of renting somewhere in London for six months why not take the family on an adventure to the country? I wanted somewhere out of the commuter belt and as far away from a motorway as possible. My aunt lived in Cheltenham, so I asked her advice. She said as luck would have it I had a distant cousin who was a property finder in Fairford – weird I know! He found me a house which was Anne Robinson's before she got really rich. It was a bit modern and slightly tasteless, like her. We lived there for six months before deciding to move to Gloucestershire permanently. Our current house was a Knights Templar hospital and the most impractical house ever but we love it."

Joly sold his trendy Notting Hill house to Salman Rushdie – as one does. "I thought about painting a big target on the roof or writing 'Salman Rushdie lives here' so it could be seen on Google Earth. I told him this when we met at the Hay-on-Wye Festival of Literature in May. He laughed politely but I don't think he was too impressed."

Joly was born in Beirut and grew up in the countryside in Lebanon. He was keen on horses and rode a lot. "I'm a good rider and like to get on a horse whenever I can. Recently, I've ridden in Morocco and Oman."

What about hunting? Would he consider it? "I used to be anti-hunting. I had an upsetting experience when I was blooded at six which really set me against it but all those anti people are so annoying – I didn't want to be one of them. And the hunting ban was such a joke. My viewpoint's changed now. I'd love to go hunting – given the chance I would do it, yes. It looks terrific fun."

He attended Brummana High School in Lebanon, an international school established by Quakers and attended by Osama bin Laden. "OK, I was six and Osama was 18," Joly says,

“OK, I was six and Osama was 18, but we still went to the same school. More embarrassingly, I was at Haileybury with Tim Henman”

“but we still went to the same school. More embarrassingly, though, I was at Haileybury with Tim Henman. I used to bully him – a lot,” he smiles with mock satisfaction.

Joly seems to have taken to country life like a duck to water. "I used to think going for a walk was utterly pointless. Why on earth would anyone want to go for a walk? But now I walk all the time with the dogs. It's very therapeutic; it gives me a chance to think and come up with ideas. Plus, I'm off to Nicaragua soon filming the *Rough Guide* series for [channel] Five. When I looked at the schedule it said 'day three, walk up mountain', so it's partly training, too. I have a gym but it's the least visited room in my house."

"I love shooting, too. I've always been into guns. When I first moved up here I went to Cotswold Shooting in Cirencester and bought up the shop. I got air pistols, air rifles, paintball

guns, a crossbow – anything I could lay my hands on that was legal without a shotgun licence." Joly explains that it's difficult to get a certificate when your company is called 'Trigger Happy' and you're known as a comedy terrorist. However, he is planning to get one soon, so he can take up invitations to shoot game. "My wife Stacey bought me a beautiful leather cartridge bag, a shooting jacket and a gun cabinet last Christmas. I was looking for the gun everywhere like an excited child before I realised she hadn't bought one. It was like being given a set of car keys but no car!"

Joly shoots clays and is a guest on several local shoots. He would like to use this opportunity to announce that all shooting invitations will be gratefully accepted. His daughter Parker, aged eight, has taken an interest in his air pistols and they regularly go to the woods to practise. "Anything to steer her away from ponies – that gets really expensive!" He also has a son, Jackson, aged four, and the entire family is keen on river swimming. "We often go to the River Coln at weekends. It's something we really enjoy. I'm also into golf," he says sheepishly. "Not the

whole club thing, members, rules, clothing – I hate all of that stuff – but it's a good walk with something to do. It's quite sociable, too."

Joly tends to socialise with friends at their houses but he occasionally pops down to The Victoria in Eastleach and on Sunday the family has lunch at The Village Pub in Barnsley. "I also go to Waitrose in Cirencester a lot – that's where I socialise most. I was queuing behind Liz Hurley's husband the other day."

Jackson wanders in. He's dressed in a Joules polo shirt, khaki trousers and coloured gumboots. I ask whether he plays polo. He doesn't but Joly proves to be keen: "I'm really up for trying that." His have-a-go attitude is endearing. I agree to set up lessons at a nearby polo club upon his return from Nicaragua. Perhaps a Trigger Happy polo team is on the cards. ■ *The second series of The Complainers will start on Five in February.*