



Robert Llewellyn

The actor, writer and presenter famous for playing Kryten in *Red Dwarf* now enjoys a more earthy life of vegetable patches and horsebox towing. By **Charlotte Reather**. Photograph by **Charles Sainsbury-Plaice**

WHEN I was younger I was a bit of a hippy and a mediaevalist – I was inspired by *The Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales* and the films of Fellini. I lived off the land for a while, hunting food with a bow and arrow. I was never into conventional country pursuits but as a teenager I was always surrounded by people who went hunting or shooting. I used to ride a lot too. All the girls in my village were at boarding-school so during term time I rode their horses. I was self-taught and very confident. I wasn't great at jumping though."

After 20 years out of the saddle, Robert recently found himself back on a horse, called Brian, at a North Cotswold fun ride with his daughter Holly, 11. "Kathy Twiston-Davies (ex-wife of National Hunt trainer Nigel) lent Brian to me. 'He's as safe as houses,' she assured me. I thought it would be a nice father-daughter bonding day but I was absolutely petrified. Kathy told me to just trot around the sides while everyone else took the jumps but Brian was having none of it – he wanted to join in the fun too. Suddenly he started dashing off sideways. I was trying my hardest to make him stop but we were totally out of control. I was shouting, "No Brian, please, no!" I had to keep him away from the jumps so I aimed him at a hedge which he galloped through, still sideways. We smashed through some saplings; I was white with fear, desperately fighting with him, all the time screaming in my head, 'I'm going to die,' when my neighbour gallops over and chats away to me like we're at the bloody local shop. I'm careering sideways into another hedge and she doesn't seem to even notice!

"That's what I admire about people who hunt – they're not fazed by anything. Their horse can be rearing up and going mad but they're on the phone, chatting, having a drink and smoking a fag – sometimes all at the same time – completely oblivious to the danger."

Robert lives in a New England-style wooden farmhouse near Stow-on-the-Wold

with his wife Judy, their two children Holly and Louis, a terrier called Daisy, two chickens and Holly's horse, Kirk. "We've been here for more than 16 years so we're almost local.

"When we first moved to Gloucestershire, in the early Nineties, I took my mother along to the local Boxing Day meet. There were only about 20 people out hunting with the North Cots then and I knew all of them. After the hunting ban there were about 250 people at the meet. It was a sea of horses and 4x4s all up from London. We didn't know any of them – we had to wade through the throng to spot a local. The ban was totally ludicrous, it just popularised hunting to the max."

Daisy the terrier waddles over. Her back leg is injured. "Daisy was involved in a hunting accident," says Robert with a grin. "She was

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out hunting baby rabbits and overdid it – dislodged her kneecap. Poor old Daisy."

While Robert's daughter is pony mad, Louis, 14, is into fishing. "My wife is Australian so when we go over to visit Grandma, Louis and I go out sea-fishing or just fish off the end of the pier. We've done quite a lot together around Sydney and Queensland. He's got all the kit at Grandma's house.

"Louis is also keen on shooting. He hasn't got a gun at the moment but he's into slingshots – a bit like I used to be. He's also been out beating a lot with two of the local shoots.

"My experience with guns is limited. I've never shot game but I've done a bit of clay-shooting. I was invited by a *Red Dwarf* fan in the US to shoot targets at a police firing range. The fan was a female traffic cop who let me use all of the firearms. It was great fun but after that experience I will never speed or mess with a traffic officer in America – they are scary.

"In the early Seventies I used to hang out with a mate on an estate at Bearsted, near Maidstone, owned by the Guinness family. We stayed with Ernie the gamekeeper in his cottage. One weekend, Ernie told me we needed a rabbit, a duck and a chicken for dinner. Being a conscientious keeper he first gave me a gun-safety briefing. I shot a rabbit, which was pretty straightforward. The game pie I made, served with vegetables from the garden, was delicious. We had some London friends over for dinner that night and when I told them how fresh the food was they were disgusted. I thought it so odd, why wouldn't you want it that fresh?"

Before moving to Gloucestershire, Robert lived in London for 20 years, where he worked as a shoemaker for John Lobb and then James

Taylor in St James's. During that time he re-heeled footwear including HRH The Prince of Wales's polo boots and Frank Sinatra's shoes. "I made gillie brogues mainly, but I also made 52 pairs of black loafers for the Saudi arms dealer, Adnan Khashoggi. He used to wear a pair a week and then

throw them away. I gave up shoemaking in the early Eighties when the acting took off."

Nowadays, when he's not racing around on a hectic schedule, Robert tends to his vegetable patch and garden, helps run the village shop, entertains the locals at the annual harvest supper and ferries Holly to and from Pony Club events.

I spy Robert's Land Rover in the drive. The photographer comments on the extra chunky tyres. "Jeremy Clarkson called me a w***** for putting them on a British Land Rover but as I pointed out it's now owned by BMW. I used to use it for *Scrapheap Challenge*, but recently it's mainly been used for towing the horsebox. I'm popular with the Pony Club mothers because I'm good at reversing trailers – I learnt how to do it as part of a farm job when I was a teenager. Frantic women accost me in fields and beg me to help them with their boxes. I'm getting used to it now." ■