In conversation with Steve Harmison

Steve Harmison rates as one of the most renowned pace bowlers in the World and is one of the best bowlers that England has ever had.

When playing for Durham in the County Championship, he was feared by every opponent. He wasn't all that popular with the Australians, West Indians etc. Batsmen had to regularly face a ball from Steve travelling in excess of 90mph. Throw in the knack of developing swing and a ferocious bounce, and it was no surprise that in 2004, he was ranked as the No.1 bowler…not just in England..but the World.

He led the England attack in the magnificent 2005 Ashes series which had the nation gripped. He was skittling-out the Aussies again four years later.

63 Test caps and 226 wickets tell its own story of how good Steve Harmison was for England. He also racked-up 58 one-day internationals and 76 wickets.

For Durham County Cricket Club he finished his 17 year career with a staggering 458 first-class wickets in 129 matches. A terrific ratio.

Since then he's spent time commentating on cricket and also spent two seasons as manager of Ashington Football Club where, incidentally, he began his sporting career as a player before deciding that cricket would be a better choice. He's a lifelong Newcastle Utd fan.

However, Steve is also one of those people who loves cars. Put it this way, he'd rather be the driver than the passenger.

What was your first car?

It was a Vauxhall Corsa. There was nothing wrong with the car apart from one important detail. I couldn't fit into it. Bearing in mind that I'm 6ft 6in, I had to sit with the driver's seat as far back as possible, but I still had my knees jammed under the steering wheel and my head was bouncing off the roof. It didn't make for a comfortable daily commute to training at Durham all the way from Ashington where I've always lived.

Tidy car or mobile skip?

I'm ashamed to admit that it's a mobile skip. I'd love to say it's because I have four children but, I have to confess, that it's always been the same. As a cricketer, it means you have to travel long distances on a regular basis up and down the country. Consequently, the car was always full of sandwich boxes, sweet wrappers, drinks tins and (don't tell the fitness coach) the odd McDonalds cartons. For some reason, even though I stopped playing a few years ago, it's still full of the same rubbish. Sigh.

Any motoring nightmares?

Being in a car with my good friend and former teammate, Neil Killeen. He has two faults. First, he's a Sunderland fan. Secondly, he kept collecting points on his driving licence. I remember setting off from Durham to go to somewhere like Somerset or Bristol and Neil was driving. As we left the ground, we did 29mph. On the motorway we did 69mph. On the back roads of the West Country we did 29mph. We approached traffic lights on green so slowly that they all turned to red. We let out anyone and everyone at junctions. We overtook…. nobody. The journey took forever. It was only after about two hours I asked Neil why we were going to slowly. It turned out he had nine points on his licence. Three more and he'd be banned. It was the longest journey of my entire life.

Best road trip you've ever done?

It was when we won the County Championship for the first time. It was a surreal moment. We were on our way back to Durham from a match and we were still waiting for results from other games to come through. All of the team were in the bus and we had SKY TV on. It was very tense.

And then we entered the Dartford Tunnel. Needless to say that the bus TV lost its signal. Traffic was crawling and it took about twenty minutes to get through the tunnel. As we approached the tunnel exit, the TV burst back into life…and the first thing we all heard was that we'd been confirmed as County Champions. The rest of the journey is..well…a bit of a blur, but I'll never forget that moment as we popped out of the tunnel and we heard the news. That was easily the best journey I've ever been on.

A close second is when I go to the USA with my family. I always hire an American gas guzzler. My favourite journey over there is probably the road to Cape Canaveral. Long, straight roads and then, on the horizon, you can see the launch pads. It's an iconic view.

Gan canny or gan fer it?

Erm….gan fer it. It not the most patient person in the World. Let's leave it at that.

Favourite road in the North East?

You can't beat the coastal route from Newcastle up passed Blyth to Ashington and beyond. When you get to Druridge Bay, Warkworth, Alnmouth, Newton-by-the Sea, Beadnell..it really is stunning. The Northumberland coastline is a hidden secret and truly beautiful.

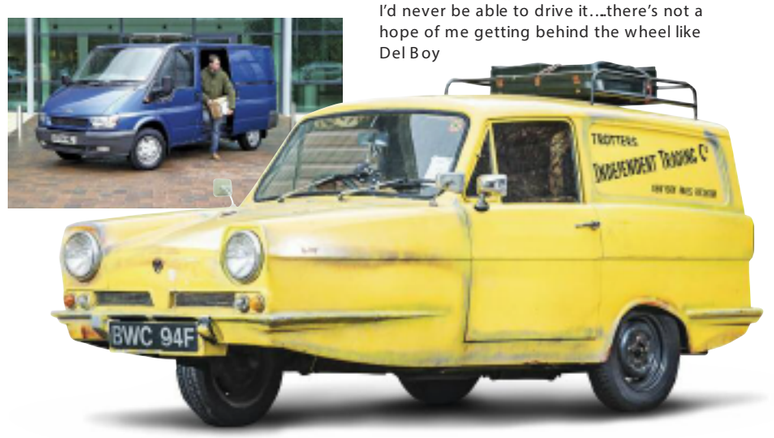
Best car (s) you've owned?

I've been fortunate to have had some great cars as part of my career with Durham County Cricket Club. Benfield Motors..now Lookers..provided me with some wonderful vehicles. The first was a Volkswagen Touareg. It was my first 'proper' car and I loved it. It was comfortable, roomy and great to drive.

I thoroughly enjoyed a BMW X5 which I can remember was really quick, but the one car that really sticks out is an Audi Q7. I could easily get all of my kit into the Q7 and, rather handily, I fitted into it as well. It was perfect for long journeys around the UK.

Worst car?

The Durham CCC kit van. It was something like a Ford Transit, but when it came to long journeys it wasn't particularly comfortable. It was in the very early days when I'd just joined Durham. The younger players were always given the job of loading and driving the kit van. However, when I got my first car, the Vauxhall Corsa, it was such a tight fit for me that I volunteered to drive the kit van. I don't miss those days.



And finally, what is your dream car?

I've got two. I was recently at Close House Golf Club for a Maserati event. We were allowed to try some of the Maseratis. They were wonderful. The best though was when I went out with one of the Maserati 'works' drivers. Wow, they know how to make a car come alive. The cars looked gorgeous.

The other car I'd love to own is the Reliant Robin van from the TV series, Only Fools and Horses. I'm a huge fan of the show and would love to own a piece of what is surely TV history. On the rear of the van where they have Trotters Independent Trading (New York, Paris & Peckham), I could put Ashington. The only snag is that I'd never be able to drive it…there's not a hope of me getting behind the wheel like Del Boy