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THE BIG INTERVIEW

I'll never marry or have children

Celeb chef James Martin on being happy as he is, how he was headed for a heart attack and his new tour

NICK McGRATH

No-nonsense telly chef James Martin likes to speak his mind – especially when it comes to kids.

He said: "I go round to my mate's house, who has four kids, and realise that I don't want them after about two minutes. Kids are great, but it's just, no, not for me. You sacrifice so much in this work and the job and everything else. Never, no."

Marriage to his girlfriend, PA Louise Davies, with whom he lives in a sprawling Hampshire mansion, is vetoed almost as strongly.

He said: "No, it doesn't interest me in the slightest, mainly because I've catered for so many weddings. I admire people who do it, but I don't need to spend 60 grand on a day, no, I'm more than happy thanks.

"Also, my mates come round to my house and they look into my garage and I go, 'These are my babies, these are my things', but you know, it's each to their own isn't it?"

Indeed, material things matter for the 46-year-old. He certainly couldn't be doing with a mere single garage, owning a 1948 Maserati, a vintage Chevrolet Courvette, a Lotus 340R and two retired Formula One cars. So what is the biggest love of his life – his cars, his beloved Shitzu dog Ralph, or Louise?

He said: "That would have to be Ralph. He's a superstar."

Perhaps realising this might go down like a Shitzu sandwich with Louise, he backtracks a little at the next moral dilemma – who couldn't he live without? "My girlfriend," he said, not entirely convincingly. "I couldn't live without her, she's great."

James is not the most forthcoming about Louise, perhaps on the back of

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over-sharing about his love life in the past. Previous relationships include a Miss UK Sally Kettle, actress Claire Goose and, most notably, a four-and-a-half-year relationship with Bond movie producer Barbara Broccoli.

During their relationship, James spilled the A-list gossip in his 2008 autobiography Driven – from rubbing shoulders with Halle Berry and Nicole Kidman at the BAFTAs to Barbara spoiling him with Picassos and even trying to buy him an £180,00 Aston Martin. Despite this, he is not a great fan of celebrity culture. To put it mildly.

He said: "I never signed up for this. I'm not one of these people that go looking for the public eye. I don't go to celeb parties, I don't hang out at nightclubs, I don't go to award ceremonies. I feel very uncomfortable being in a room full of people praising themselves.

"I don't really want to have a drink with you anyway. I'll go back to my mates. Most of my mates are ones I've had for 25 years before I got into this crazy circus of a business where people are obsessed by celebrity."

He first got in to the 'crazy old circus' on Ready Steady Cook with his friend and mentor Antony Worrall Thompson and had a stint on the Big Breakfast before cementing his name on the BBC's Saturday Kitchen (he's now defected to ITV). Being in the public eye has clearly helped James develop a rhino thick skin.

He said: "I genuinely don't give a s**t what people write about me. It doesn't bother me in the slightest."

But take a pop at his inspiration and mother Sue, and he unleashes a boiling rage hotter than any curry he's ever knocked up for the cameras.

He said: "What offends me is when people say stuff on social media and it affects other people around me. My mum's 72. That's when it affects me."

Having recently travelled and cooked his way across America for his ITV travelogue, James's latest baby is his 18-date UK tour, organised by the same promoters who have staged vast gigs for the likes of Taylor Swift and Madonna.

He said: "When I toured last time and walked on stage for the first night my mother said, 'I can't believe you're doing this because the last time you were on stage was at primary school in the nativity playing one of the three kings, and you were so bad you got hooked off and made to look after the lighting'."

But James's nerveless performance skills means that neither live TV or live stage shows faze him.

He said: "I don't get stressed. It's not life or death. There are a lot more stressful things in life. I'm not getting shot at in the army am I? That's real bloody stress."

Mortality is something James has been more mindful of since he witnessed a good friend drop dead from a heart attack during a live performance in Dubai a couple of years ago.

He said: "That did make me think that we can all become very blinkered in trying to be successful and made me realise that perhaps I needed to take my foot off the pedal a little and enjoy life a little more. I've got a better balance now.

"A few years ago I was probably headed for a heart attack. I was just a walking bloody mess, I was working seven days a week, I hadn't had a day off for a year. But I've re-evaluated."

James revaluation has included a dramatic four stone weight loss. Down from just over 19 stone to 14-and-a-half stone, he insists it's exercise rather than diet that helped him shed the pounds.

He said: "I don't eat anything different and I'm not down the gym every day but I go biking with my mates and look after myself better. Although you might still have a to wait a while for the six pack."

Whatever the future holds, James firmly believes that his mum's analysis of his talents is most likely to keep him on the straight and narrow.

He said: "People ask, 'how have you managed to stay on the TV for 26 years?' and I always tell them what my mum says. That I'm grounded like the guy next door and that I haven't changed.

"I'm not the best chef on TV but I love my job, I feel very lucky to do it, I always treat people with respect and I just love working with talented and fascinating people. And long may that continue."

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■ **James Martin's On The Road Tour starts October 3. For tickets see jamesmartinlive.com**

> **I genuinely don't give a s*** what people write about me. It doesn't bother me in the slightest**

COOK OF LOVE Chef with girlfriend Louise Davies

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