

[See all Life](#)

## Harry's Garage: meet the David Attenborough of classic cars

Undimmed enthusiasm rather than bowing to commercial pressure – not to mention longevity – is the key to success as former farmer finds fame

By Duarte Dias

1 April 2021 • 11:29am

[Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [WhatsApp](#) [Email](#) | [Comments](#) 89

Farming may be how Harry Metcalfe made a living for most of his life, but he is better known for his car-related Youtube channel *Harry's Garage*. In this corner of the online universe, Harry shares his passion for classics and high-end sports cars with an audience of nearly half a million subscribers.

“I am a farmer – I keep telling people – I’m a farmer, not a journalist, and it was all by accident,” he laughed.

The backdrop for most of his videos is his enviable collection of undisputable classics, which range from British icons to Italian poster-cars. It is in this setting that Metcalfe will delve into each topic with an understated wisdom that subtly hooks you into his videos and satisfies a curiosity you probably didn't realise you had.

One day he'll show you a full engine swap on his Lambordghini Espada, the next he's poring over the costs of running a fleet of classics, or testing how the new Land Rover Defender fares as a real farm vehicle.

Advertisement

Alternatively, you might also be invited to follow one of his epic road trips in which he takes a 1969 Rolls-Royce Shadow to the Arctic Circle, or a Ferrari Testarossa to the Saharan desert.

Driving a '69 Rolls Royce Shadow to the Arctic in th...



“It’s just sharing the passion but I don’t overload it. I’m not going for a career in this at all,” said Metcalfe when asked about his Youtube channel.

“I don’t need to do videos. The first thing I did was get a sponsor on board because that meant I didn’t have to chase what was going to be popular. I can honestly present what’s going on.”

His actual career has always been in farming. An HND in Agriculture from Shuttleworth College in 1981 taught him more than just wheat varieties, fungicides and livestock. Crucially, this is where Metcalfe learned to look after accounts and run a business.

Metcalfe with a fraction of his collection; not all are exotic, but each is interesting. He also has a passion for enduro motorcycles  
| CREDIT: John Lawrence

That allowed for a quick transition into the business of grain buying, before eventually taking on some land of his own. But in parallel, he always had an interest in motoring.

He had, after all, been fixing his friends’ and teachers’ cars for cash by the time he was 17, “back when cars broke”.

Advertisement

What does he love most about cars? “It’s the escapism, firstly,” he said without pause for thought.

“When you start the car it doesn’t know whether you’re just going to the shops, or it might go to the Sahara, as was the case with the Testarossa. It’s your call, that’s what it does.

His much-travelled Ferrari Testarossa sits alongside the Lamborghini Countach and a Lotus Esprit in his barn | CREDIT: John Lawrence

“The sense of freedom is extraordinary, the journeys and the experiences.”

That passion for motoring would eventually lead to the launch of the hugely successful *Evo* magazine alongside seasoned car journalists in 1998.

Metcalf had encountered the world of motoring journalism a few years prior when he lent his newly bought limited edition Maserati Ghibli Cup – the only right-hand-drive example in the country – to *Performance Car* magazine. Out of sheer interest, he eventually found himself coming up with ideas for articles and taking part in group tests.

Getting a new magazine off the ground meant stepping away from farming and even using a loan of £275,000 – originally intended for a new grain facility – to cover most of

the costs. Despite the huge investment and risk in self-publishing a brand new title, this was an opportunity to freely channel all that motoring passion without the oversight of publisher bosses or external shareholders.

Metcalfe in the Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow that he drove to the Arctic | CREDIT: John Lawrence

“We put out the magazine we really wanted to put out,” he said. “The independence was heavenly, and it just worked. We had four passionate guys who produced [the magazine] we wanted to read.”

Advertisement

“There’s no short corners, we’re not going to dumb it down. Then at least we can say if it doesn’t work, we gave it the best shot. So we did and it bloody boomed.”

As it turned out, allowing enthusiasts to write what they wanted to read proved to be popular and the magazine was a success. But once the age of digital publishing dawned, the car reviewing experience was compressed, and Harry became a minority shareholder. It became clear the freedom to share his motoring passion had been diluted.

“Having been my own boss all the way, I suddenly found myself as an employee. The publisher got control above me,” he explained.

Old and new: the scintillating Toyota GR Yaris sits just in view alongside Harry's white Lotus Esprit plus diminutive Lotus Elan and Fiat 500 | CREDIT: John Lawrence

“We weren’t editorially-led any more, we were publisher-led and I just didn’t enjoy it. In 2013 I just said ‘I’m out of here’”

Swapping print for video, the *Harry's Garage* Youtube channel was born out of Metcalfe's desire to continue freely sharing his passion and what he finds interesting, rather than what will generate the most revenue. Particularly now there was more than a decade's worth of stories and experiences to share.

Advertisement

Metcalfe's fans have described the phenomenon as “the David Attenborough effect”.

“He’s been around the block, seen everything and there’s a confidence where he’s not trying to present himself,” said Metcalfe.

“You dismiss the knowledge you’ve built up after 30 years of testing crazy cars because you think ‘no one wants to listen to me talk about that’. I thought I ought to just do it.”

Having the classic car insurer Footman James as a sponsor from the early days of the Youtube channel afforded Metcalfe the freedom to concentrate purely on making the sort

of videos he would be interested in watching.

In a platform brimming with clickbait titles and shouty, over-the-top personalities, *Harry's Garage* stands out as the very antithesis of that approach. His casually-presented videos come across as subtly entertaining yet well-informed.

“I don't want to be yet another presenter of the same content and I don't want you to know what's coming next on *Harry's Garage*. It's a complete surprise.”

Much of that is down to the fact that Metcalfe is a veteran who doesn't feel he needs to impress a huge audience. Just like in the early days of *Evo* magazine, the focus is on sharing a passion, rather than impressing advertisers.

Advertisement

A testament to the organic nature of the videos are their titles, which Metcalfe admits aren't written to attract the attention of the greatest number of people (as is the case with most full-time Youtubers), but rather to best describe the content.

"Not a bad life, is it?" | CREDIT: John Lawrence

“I never thought of myself in front of a camera,” he said. “I just saw that's where the audience was going.

“Behind the mask it’s a very simple operation. My wife does the filming, I’ve done my own editing since 2018 and no one else is involved – it’s a kitchen table operation.”

Despite not seeking fame or viewership, the channel has grown inexorably, although his realisation of its popularity only came about 12 to 18 months ago.

Being recognised in public is an aspect which is still surprising to Metcalfe, but it never manages to turn his focus to popularity. Past offers of external work have also failed to move him, making it very clear he plans only to continue sharing the passion.

“I wouldn’t say I’m retired, but it’s not a bad life, is it?”

Advertisement

For new and used buying guides, tips and expert advice, [visit our Advice section](#), or sign up to our newsletter [here](#)

To talk all things motoring with the Telegraph Cars team join the Telegraph Motoring Club Facebook group [here](#)

[A-Z Car Finder](#)

---

## Cars Newsletter

Your essential motoring digest with news and reviews from around the automotive world.



Sign up

---

Related Topics

YouTube, Lamborghini

    |  89

---

The Telegraph values your comments but kindly requests all posts are on topic, constructive and respectful. Please review our [commenting policy](#).

Show comments