

GH loves...

Interview by **Kerry Fowler**
Photograph by **Michael Birt**

Sir Matthew Pinsent

FOUR-TIMES OLYMPIC GOLD ROWING CHAMPION Sir Matthew Pinsent CBE, 37, is a reporter for BBC Sports and is covering the Beijing Olympic Games from 8 August. He lives with wife Dee, twin boys Lucas and Jonah, aged two, and baby daughter Eve.

Has it ever been to your disadvantage to be a sun-kissed, striking, strapping six-foot-five chappy?

Only on planes in economy...

At the risk of sounding like someone who remembers a very old soap ad, how do you stay so young looking?

A lot of the blokes I row with are beginning to sprout grey hairs, but as yet... And there is a bald gene in our family, but it seems to have skipped me. My daily skincare routine is pretty much rubbing my face with a towel.

Do you love your sport commentating role?

Technically I'm reporting, not commentating, which is journalistically quite testing. I've hardly done any rowing stories and it's been good to have a breadth of disciplines to get my head round.

Do you miss wearing the Lycra?

Well, I've had to throw a lot of it out because every year you'd get a different sponsor and a different kit. So I've had to de-clutter the sports wardrobe – but Dee will tell you that's a job that isn't complete.

Why did you decide to retire after the 2004 Olympics in Athens?

When I did the Barcelona Olympics I was back training within three weeks; after Atlanta it was about three months; after Sydney, about five. After each of those three Games my body, my spirit and my appetite to compete returned; but I knew after Athens my appetite had gone and I didn't fight it.

So do you row still?

A little. There's an email list of old farts who go out on the water about once a month. If having our twin boys hadn't killed me off before, then Eve certainly has now. I am properly retired.

Where will we do well in the Games?

For British teams it will be rowing, sailing and cycling. Cycling is really impressive at the moment and the rowing team is probably one of our strongest. I think we've got about seven fantastic medal chances – one or two, even three, might be gold.

What do you think about the politics surrounding the Olympics?

I think Tibet and the human rights issues are a lot further forward and a lot more discussed than they ever would have been if the Games weren't taking place in China. So from that point of view, it's a

step forward. Beyond that, what can I say? I work for the BBC, so I have to be seen to be impartial, watch developments and report on them as an observer.

Was it intimidating rowing with Steve Redgrave when he was a 28-year-old Olympian and you were just 19?

To put a 19-year-old in a boat with a double Olympic champion who's got a reputation for being pretty bolshy was a hard situation. But I had to get stuck in.

So it was a very intense, bonding experience?

Definitely. I spent more time with him than with anybody. I've been married six years; I spent 10 years rowing with Steve. I wonder if I've spent more nights with him than with my wife...? A sobering thought.

And you are still best mates now?

It couldn't be any other way, really.

Is he someone you would turn to in difficult times?

Yes, I suppose I would. After the birth of the boys my wife was pretty ill, and Steve was definitely someone I spoke to that first day. On a practical level, but also on a deep friendship level, he was quite an important person to talk it through with.

In the BBC series *Who Do You Think You Are?*, it transpired you are descended from Edward I.

How did it feel to discover there's a bit of royalty in you?

Well, it's a fair way back. It's not exactly Auntie Liz or whatever. It's a great grand-dad times 31 or 32. You think it makes you special, but then it's not just me – everyone in my family, every cousin is linked to him, so it doesn't single you out.

But you are a Sir, now.

Yes, this is true, so I can still lord it over my cousins...

