



# Charley Says...

Charley Boorman: intrepid explorer, actor or just a motorcycle fanatic? *Kasha Van Sant* finds out more

When I was a kid I used to have three posters on my wall. “Oh really which ones?” I enquire. “I had Barry Sheen, one of Easy Rider and the other was Farah Fawcett Majors.” I nod, knowing that the boyish Mr Boorman most probably wasn’t alone in his bikes and eye-candy fantasy. The man we all know and love as the creator of the *Long Way Round* and *Long Way Down* travel series seems astonishingly down to earth, to the point that I have to restrain the billing and cooing girl in the room listening intently to our phone call. I mentally readjust my questions and decide against the obvious Ewan McGregor references. Blissfully unaware Charley continues.

“The funny thing is that later I met Barry Sheen in a restaurant. We were having dinner, there was about eight of us and on the other table there was Barry Sheen,

Murray Walker and a whole bunch of other Formula 1 guys. I went off to the bathroom and by the time I got back, Barry Sheen was sitting beside my wife and chatting her up! Which I thought was a great honour. Luckily she didn’t go off with him!”

It appears not, as I hear Ollie (aka Mrs Boorman) milling around in the background. The benevolent and humble Charley is probably most well known for trekking around the world on motorbikes with Ewan McGregor, both growing fabulous facial hair and making people wish they could pick up and do something exciting with their time. Appreciative recipients of their DVDs will testify at wishing they could follow suit. How did Charley feel about that?

“Great! If I can inspire someone to travel to somewhere in the world because of me, then great!” Charley meanders, “Someone once told me that the Royal Family had

watched it one Christmas. Just imagining the Queen and the royals watching me and Ewan is hilarious!”

I very quickly get the impression that Charley Boorman is particularly unfazed by high profile characters. I imagine him turning up at Balmoral, boundless enthusiasm, squeezing in on the sofa, helping himself to sandwiches and Battenburg.

Having grown up the son of actor John Boorman and acted from a young age, he would have had access to the Hollywood elite and I sense that ‘Ma’am’ doesn’t even make a dent on that.

It’s all for charity we know, but Charley’s latest endeavour sees him travel without his trusty partner, Ewan. (Who I still haven’t mentioned).

“*On By Any Means* we went from Ireland to Sydney. Next we will start in Sydney and make our way up Pacific Rim, Papua New



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Guinea, Philippines, Japan and Russia.”

Being *sans* Ewan I ask which people (alive or dead) from history and the present he would wish to partner him on his trip? After bemoaning the difficulty of the question, he answers: “If I had to travel with anyone from the past it would have to be Steve McQueen. It’s a bit of an obvious choice, he was a great actor but he was an amazing bike rider. Do you know he rode for Team America in the World Enduro Championships? He was a proper full-on Enduro rider!”

I recall that famous McQueen quote, “I’m not sure whether I’m an actor who races or a racer who acts.” I voice my approval. And a woman from history?

“Amy Johnson. She flew south from London to Sydney. She was a fantastic British flier.” Now to the present, the answer is instantaneous. “Ewan.” I laugh, “No you can’t choose Ewan!” To which he retorts, “I wouldn’t want to go with anyone else!” I am relentless, “Ewan’s been rejected!”

“Okay I would probably go with my mate Roy. Roy is a good laugh, he used to run a



motorcycle shop in London and he helped me buy my first road bike.” I sense the romantic in Charley rear its head. “So he’s sentimentality personified!” He laughs, “Yeah he just a really cool, funny guy. He’s very tall and loud and a fun character!”

How about the woman? Sensing that Charley may pull another ‘Ewan’ on me I stipulate that family members or friends aren’t allowed.

“I’m trying to think, trying to think. The pressure, the pressure it’s mounting on me!” We pause a while, Charley mutters and mumbles yet again. I wonder if I am putting him on the spot.

“It would have to be. It would be an explorer, oh God I can’t remember her name. Oh God! Ah yes Ellen McArthur!”

Ellen McArthur I am sure, would breathe

a sigh of relief and perhaps laugh as much as I have listening to Charley as we shashy through everything from his love of bikes – his weapon of choice being “BMW’s GS Adventurers, the Land Rover for bikes” – and the fact that he is motivated by the word ‘no’ – the Dakar Rally being a case in point; to his dyslexia, (he is President of Dyslexia Action) and finally the fact that the last time he cried was watching X Factor.

I share his pain, but something tells me that the lion-maned softy was shedding tears of joy! ■

To find out more about Charley’s adventures or dealing with dyslexia go to: <http://byanymeans.bigearth.tv> [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)