

The full Monty

Adventurer and TV star Monty Halls, with his side-kick Reuben, chats to Guy Whitmore

As a diver, explorer, marine biologist and former Royal Marine, Monty Halls is something of a comic-book hero come to life. With his faithful canine companion Reuben by his side, it's easy to imagine the pair disappearing into the unknown, taking danger in their stride and escaping certain death by a whisker while embarking on some great adventure.

Having said that, if you believe Monty, life for Reuben is not about adventure, it's about searching for a bigger stick to chew.

The pair hit our television screens in 2008, when they went in search of the simple life, living in a restored bothy on the West Coast of Scotland. With no other creature comfort than a 28-tog duvet, the pair pitched themselves against the harsh weather, wilderness and solitude, together with the added challenge of surviving off as much homegrown produce and recycled rainwater as possible.

But as a former Marine and explorer who has dodged the bullets of poachers, swam with white sharks and photographed crocodiles, that would be another day in the office, wouldn't it? Well no, not necessarily. With disarming honesty, Monty confesses that there were times when he did, in fact, get pretty nervous.

'When I first moved into the bothy, it was a dark stone barn with the wind whistling around it, pitch black and cold,' he says candidly. 'I'm human at the end of the day, so I was a bit on edge from time to time. So it was good to know Reuben was there keeping a look out for me.'

For Monty, being alone with a dog in the wilderness is what man has been doing for thousands of years, so his adventures with Reuben - or Reubes - goes to the very core of the bond that exists between man and dog. Monty got the German Shepherd-cross after his previous dog, Mia, was run over not long before he was due to film *The Great Escape* in West Scotland.

As Monty was to be by himself for most of the time he was at the bothy, he decided a dog was a must, so went to a local animal rescue centre.

'I went in and asked for an easy going dog that I could get along with and would happily join me in my adventures for the *Great Escape*, and the three girls in the office said 'Reuben' in unison,' he continues. 'As soon as I met him we got on brilliantly, and soon after, Reubes and I

Guy Whitmore

Writing for *Countryside* for five years
Guy has a strong interest in farming and rural affairs



were starting our great adventure.'

If ever there was a natural for the television, adds Monty, it's Reuben. With a happy-go-lucky character, natural warmth, and constant inquisitiveness, it is no surprise people ask 'where's Reubes?' if Monty goes somewhere without him.

'People want to meet him, and when they do, Reubes always lives up to expectations,' explains the former Marine.

'He is just a laid-back, happy-go-lucky

“ He always feels the need to jump in and rescue me ”

fella with lots of character, which really comes across on the television. That's why he's the star of the show.'

There are times, though, when Reuben stops being laid back and that's when Monty is in the water - which can be a drawback considering the 43-year-old's love for diving.

'He always feels a need to jump in after me and rescue me,' adds Monty with a grin. 'We think there is New Foundland in him as he has webbed paws, which means he loves water, and definitely feels an urge to save me whenever he sees me in water.'

It was Monty's passion for diving that led to him joining the armed forces. After travelling the globe for three years diving, he joined the Royal Navy as he thought it would be a great way to dive for a living.

However, things did not go to plan. After initially planning to join the underwater mine clearance team - well, what else would a comic boy hero do? - he discovered it would be at least



three years training before he would be clearing mines.

This was too long, so Monty reassessed his options and transferred to the Marines, where he ended up leading expeditions and diving in some of the most far-flung and environmentally challenging places on the globe. While he left the forces as a Captain following a decision to pursue a career leading expeditions, he remained in the Territorial Army.

However, fate struck when Monty was put forward to represent the Marines in Channel Four's *Superhuman* contest, which aimed to find the ultimate high performer. In true comic book style, he won, and in doing so, kick-started a media career that has seen him present a number of television shows.

Apart from his original *Great Escape* programme in West Scotland, he filmed *Monty Halls Great Hebridean Escape* in which he worked as a volunteer wildlife ranger, and presented a number of shows including Channel Four's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*.

More recently, he filmed in the *Great Barrier Reef* for a major series to be aired on BBC 2 next year, and made *Monty Halls' Great Irish Escape*, in which he worked with the Irish Whale and Dolphin Conservation Group. The *Great Irish Escape* starts on BBC Two this June.

When not working for television, Monty is busy being a best-selling author and a motivational speaker. He also supports a number of charities, including the Royal Marines Charitable Trust Fund and Holly Hedge Animal Sanctuary.

While he has had a passion for all things to do with water since he learnt to walk, he also enjoys the countryside, and the community spirit he says still exists in rural areas. This was something he became aware of while filming in West Scotland.

'It taught me a great deal about engaging with those around me, which is something society does not do as much,' he continues. 'The *Great Escape* was a real lesson, and taught me the importance of engaging with the community you are in.'

But it wasn't just the social interaction, that Monty learned all about. It was the satisfaction gained from living a more simple life. So much so, that he intends to grow his own vegetables, keep bees, chickens and goats when he moves from Bristol to Devon later this year.

But is he looking to become self-sufficient? 'No, I am doing a half-way house,' says Monty.

'Being self-sufficient is such hard work and time consuming; I really take my hat off to anyone who achieves it. I'm looking to grow my own vegetables, keep animals and bees, but mixing that with buying local produce and supporting local producers.'

MAN OF ACTION: Monty Halls with Reuben, and right, during one of his filming adventures

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