

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards



CELEBRITY SAS: WHO DARES WINS

SERIES 5

PRESS PACK

**TX: Stream or watch live on Channel 4: Tuesday 26 September, 9.30,
continuing on Sundays at 9pm from 1 October
7 x 60 minute episode**



The toughest series on TV is back with SIXTEEN new celebrities who will spend the next SEVEN weeks being put through the most gruelling jungle stages of SAS selection. With more celebrity recruits taking part than ever before, the fifth series of *Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins* returns to Channel 4, and is available to stream or watch live from Tuesday 26 September at 9.30pm, continuing on Sundays from 1 October at 9pm.

No allowances or exceptions will be made for this group of celebrities, who will be tested to their mental and physical limits, through a series of brutal tasks and interrogations. Taking part in the punishing jungle phase of SAS selection - one of the toughest environments faced by Special Forces operatives - are Former Health Secretary, **Matt Hancock** (44); Singers, **Gareth Gates** (38); **Michelle Heaton** (43) and **Siva Kaneshwaran** (34); TV Personality, **Danielle Lloyd** (39); TV Presenter, **Melinda Messenger** (51); Ex-Premier League Footballer, **Jermaine Pennant** (40), Ex-Welsh Rugby International,

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Gareth Thomas (48), Reality TV Stars **James "Arg" Argent** (35), **Montana Brown** (27), **Teddy Soares** (28), **Amber Turner** (29), Comedian, **Zoe Lyons** (51), Actor, **Kirsty-Leigh Porter** (34), Great British Olympian, **Perri Shakes-Drayton** (34) and Paralympic Gold Medalist, **Jon-Allan Butterworth MBE**,

There will be no special treatment for any of the celebrities, as they confront surprising truths about themselves, to discover their true selves. Not everyone will have what it takes to make it to the end of this course run by the elite team of ex-Special Forces operators - Chief Instructor, **Billy Billingham MBE QCB** and his team of Directing Staff (DS), **Foxy (Jason Fox)**, **Rudy Reyes** and **Chris Oliver**. The DS don't care how famous the recruits are, how many social media followers they have or what they have done before this. As soon as they enter the selection process, their celebrity status and luxuries are stripped away. Towards the end of the series, as the recruits reach the end of the course, the Directing Staff will decide which of the celebrity recruits have what it takes to pass this unique SAS selection course. Who will make it that far?

Talking about this year's celebrity recruits, the DS commented:

Chief Instructor, **Billy**: "SAS selection course follows the ethos of the regiment. Self-motivation, self-discipline. pursuit of excellence and the will to never give up. Our recruits will be pushed emotionally, physically, and mentally beyond anything they have ever experienced. The standards will never drop but most of the recruits will!!!! No concessions, No excuses!! Only results ..."

Foxy: "To get through Special Forces selection, you need to be someone who is self-sufficient, robust and resilient. If the celebrities turn up with the wrong attitude thinking it's a fun boot camp, then we have no choice but to keep the pressure on until they stop acting like it's a holiday. This course is like an awakening for celebrities..."

Rudy: "Special Operations require unique human beings. Warriors who are not defined by status or background but by grit and merit. Every recruit no matter how rich, talented or famous will be tested in the most extreme of ways and only the truly strong will remain. Strong in mind, body and spirit."

Chris: "If these celebrities think we'll be going easy on them, they can think again. The jungle is relentless and the environment is out to get you. If we don't break them, the hot, humid temperatures and the insects will! The reason we use the jungle for Special Forces Selection is because it's horrendous. Our celebrity recruits will have to show extreme resilience and embrace their surrounding if they are to be successful."

Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins is a Minnow Films production for Channel 4. The Executive Producers for series five are **Liam Humphreys**, **Ricky Keleher** and **Richard Cooke**, the Series Producer is **Freddie Foss-Smith** and Channel 4's Commissioning Editor for Science and Adventure is **Jonah Weston**.

ENDS

For further information, interview requests, clips and to view the programmes, please contact:

Gail Davidson gail@gaildavidsonpr.co.uk

[Click here to download the first look **Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins** Series 5 trailer](#)

[Clip here for episode 1 clips](#)

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Picture Enquiries to:

Carl Palmer CAPalmer@Channel4.co.uk / picturepublicity@channel4.co.uk

[Click here to download images of the celebrities](#)

[Click here to download images of the DS](#)

[Click here for episode 1 images](#)

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INTERVIEWS WITH THE *CELEBRITY SAS: WHO DARES WINS* SERIES 5 RECRUITS

MATT HANCOCK – RECRUIT NUMBER 1



Age: 43

From: London

Occupation: Former Health Secretary

As the UK's Health Secretary throughout the Covid19 lockdown, Matt faced some of the greatest challenges in any civilian role. By taking on the SAS: Who Dares Wins course, Matt wants to push himself out of his comfort zone, test his limits, and show the country the real Matt Hancock, not just the man behind the podium who the nation watched during daily press conferences throughout the pandemic.

Why did you want to take part in this show?

I wanted to do it to push my limits, to test my limits. I'd just come through a pretty tough period being the Health Secretary during the pandemic, so I wanted to test my physical limits.

Why now? Is it something you've previously wanted to do?

I have always liked to push myself physically. From my expedition to the North Pole in my early 20s where I ended up getting frostbite, to winning a horse race at Newmarket, and running the London Marathon, I enjoy testing my physical capability and mental resilience. I wanted to see if I've still got it.

Are you a fan of the show?

Oh yes! I've been a massive fan of the show for years, from the early days, the Scottish series, and last year in Jordan, where it looked unbelievably tough in the heat.

Did you feel going into it that you had anything to prove?

I wanted to push my limits in terms of resilience but also physically. I just took the attitude that I must absolutely throw myself at whatever is in front of me. And I really enjoyed that. It was both tough and grueling, but enjoyable and very rewarding at the same time.

Do you think that everything you went through as Health Minister around the pandemic strengthened your mental resilience and helped you as you took part in this course?

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We learn something from everything we do. Every day I learn something new. The pandemic was the biggest challenge this country has faced since the second world war. It was unprecedented, incredibly tough and tested my resilience.

Did you do anything to prepare for the show?

Yes, I did. I was reasonably fit, and I'd actually done the tour of Mont Blanc, which is a 100 mile walk in four days. I did that a couple of months before, so I was in pretty good shape, but I did an intensive fitness programme in the month before, and that definitely helped. However, it is not really about physical fitness, it's about mental resilience. It's about the ability to put one foot in front of the other. And the way I got through it was every time there was something else in front of me, I just kept telling myself, "You can do it. You can always walk five more paces, you can always carry one more thing, and you've just got to keep going, and if you can just keep going, then you can succeed."

Was there anything you were worried about before the course started?

I've actually never been in a boxing ring and I was pretty worried about that, and I was worried on two counts. I was worried about being pitted against a much bigger or fitter guy. But I was also worried about being pitted against a woman, and being asked to hit her because that is something that I never want to do.

What did you think when you saw the rest of the lineup?

The lineup was wonderful, actually. I was in awe of some of the people who I'd admired for years. I thought there'd be some people who were bigger or stronger than me, and by God there were! And that was slightly terrifying. Perri's an Olympic athlete, Gareth Thomas is one of the finest Welsh rugby players in history. Just colossal. Teddy is incredibly strong. And so there was that side, but also everybody was so welcoming. It really makes a big difference that it's essentially a collaborative challenge, because the number of people who finish depends who the DS think are capable of finishing. And so it's not a competition. I remember walking in and Gareth Thomas was immediately, completely wonderful and welcoming and funny. And a couple of other people were really, really kind and warm, and that really helped.

What do you make of the DS?

They are extraordinary people. The intensity and the integrity that they show is exceptional, so I found them quite inspiring to be with actually. They can teach us all a thing or two about resilience.

How did you feel when they were screaming at you?

You know there's no malice in what they're saying - you know it's to get the job done. They pushed my buttons, especially early on. And actually what they're teaching you on the course is not to rise to it when they push your buttons. They push your buttons to get the rise, and then they show you the consequence of that. And so you learn not to! It's part of the training, and actually it's a really important lesson in life in not rising to somebody when they have a go. I didn't feel like I struggled with it. I don't know if that comes over, but I don't suffer fools gladly. They are definitely not fools and I had respect for what they were doing.

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For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Do you think your experience in front of the UK press corps prepared you and helped you avoid rising to the DS when they tried to push your buttons?

I'm used to dealing with some pretty aggressive incoming, but the DS were something else.

Was there one member of the DS who you particularly wanted to impress?

Well, you want to impress them all really, but as Chief Instructor, Billy has a stature and a charisma that is very compelling. You can't help but want to impress him.

You have to fight Jermaine Pennant during the milling task. What was that like?

He's a former England footballer and he's no softy. At the same time, I was relieved that I wasn't being paired with somebody even bigger. Or a woman. But I thought, this is a bad moment! It didn't hurt nearly as much as I expected actually, being smacked in the face. The bravery some people showed sticking at it, especially when there were unequal bouts. I remember Jon, absolutely ferocious. It was unbelievable watching him. That was absolutely incredible. What a guy!

How did you keep morale up in the compound?

I really enjoyed our time in camp. There was a real rapport and we all tried to help each other get through it. One of my lasting impressions and memories from taking part in the course was of this really, really collegiate sense that we were all in this together.

Who were you particularly close to on the course?

I can honestly say everyone was incredibly supportive. It was a really great group and it was a real pleasure to get to know everyone, and support each other. Some of the conversations we had were fascinating and I thoroughly enjoyed becoming part of the unit.

What did you want to get out of this course?

I wanted to really test myself and be pushed to my limit to see whether I could come through to the end. It's safe to say the course tested my resilience!

What was your biggest fear going into the course?

The thing I feared most was collapsing and not being able to carry on. I have always been quite resilient and enjoy being challenged, but you don't know how you'll cope until you're thrown in.

Did you get close to that point?

Yes – many times. When you test your resilience and push your boundaries you always know you're going to feel the pressure to stop. But I kept going.

Did you ever consider quitting?

Having my rib broken was probably the closest I got but I was determined to keep going so I just kept my mouth shut so I wasn't medically discharged.

What stopped you?

I've talked a lot about resilience. It's my resilience and determination to keep going that pushed me forward. I'm also an optimist and that helps you to keep moving forward when it might be easier to give up.

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How would you compare the SAS jungle to the I'm A Celebrity Jungle?

They're very different and both tested my resilience. There wasn't a lot to do in the Australian jungle, so I was always looking forward to the tasks. The opposite was true on SAS where your physical and mental resilience was tested to its limits almost every minute of every day. Sitting down was a luxury!

How would you sum up the whole experience?

Being on SAS was like nothing else. I mean, it's one of the toughest physical things I've ever done. And it really opens your eyes and makes you really look into yourself.

Any advice for somebody about to tackle it the next time?

Just keep putting one foot in front of the other.

JAMES 'ARG' ARGENT – RECRUIT NUMBER 2



Age 34

From: Essex

Occupation: Reality TV Star

Back in 2010, Arg was one of the leading cast members on *The Only Way is Essex* but having always dreamed of being a full-time wedding singer he is finally doing what he loves. Arg wants the SAS course to be his ultimate comeback. After battling with a highly documented addiction, sharing his weight loss journey of 14 stone and his gastric sleeve surgery, his goal in life now is to stay clean, sober and have a good relationship with food. Since overcoming so much, his biggest fear is quitting and giving up.

Why did you want to take on this experience?

First of all, I'm a big fan of the show, but I don't ever really watch reality television anymore, especially since I left **TOWIE** all those years ago. I have just never really watched or been interested in reality TV. Most of the time I'll be on YouTube, just watching vocalists, singers, bands, boxing, that's what my interests are. But I've had friends who have been on the show, **Joey Essex**, **Ferne McCann** and **Jeff Brazier** and tuned in to watch them. Then as I was

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watching the show, I actually became a fan of it. So when I got the opportunity, I just had to do it.

How did you prepare for the show?

Did I do anything specifically for *Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins*? Yes, I did actually. I started doing some boxing and some sparring. I was doing 5km runs and stuff like that. I wish I was more used to carrying weights and a bag, and my backpack. But I didn't do any of that. But I was doing runs and I was trying to build up a bit of stamina. I did some full body strength training in the gym and stuff like that. I was just trying to generally get fitter and stronger.

What was your biggest fear or worry about taking on the course?

Flying out there, my biggest fear was more about timing. Was I ready? Had this come slightly too soon, maybe a year too soon, and could I really reach my full potential? I was comparing myself to the others a little bit too much, thinking, oh, everyone else is fitter than me, everyone else is stronger than me, everyone else has had a good level of fitness for years.

What did you think your strengths and weaknesses were going to be on the course?

I thought my strengths were going to be my heart, my determination. I really, really wanted it. I didn't do *Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins* because I wanted to build a bigger profile for myself. I wasn't doing it for the money. I was literally doing it because I really wanted to push myself and really achieve something and have another goal.

How would you rate your mental strength going into the show?

I think I was in a very good place going into the show. Not long before the show had started, all my weight that I wanted to lose, I'd lost. I had quite a good time with sobriety. Work was going well. I was feeling happy and healthy at the time. So I feel like if I wasn't, then I definitely wouldn't have taken part.

What did you think when you saw who you are going to be up against on the show?

It was a real mixed bunch. It was quite a good group. I could tell that everyone was quite competitive in a way. Everyone wanted to be there, whether it was for themselves, whether it was their kids who were motivating them, because they wanted to make their kids or their families proud, or whatever it was. But everyone was pretty competitive and had different reasons for why they wanted to do well. I feel like the camaraderie was quite good in the group. Initially it seemed like we were trying to push each other, and motivate each other.

Did having so many sports stars make it competitive?

Yeah! We had a Paralympian, **Jon**; we had **Gareth Thomas**, a rugby player; **Jermaine Pennant**, a footballer; **Perri** - an Olympic hurdler. And also you've got to remember, I've seen **Amber** and what she's made of. We go to the same gym in Chigwell, so I've seen her

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there every single day, and I knew that she was seriously fit and strong. So it was all a little bit daunting knowing that I was surrounded by athletes and Olympians and fitness fanatics and stuff like that.

What did you make of the DS?

I liked all the DS. They were very, very tough. Very, very strict. I found it very difficult because I would feel like in my head and my heart, I was really doing well at points and giving 110%. And in life, I always look for approval. And in anything I do, I always look for reassurance and approval. When I was giving it 100% and I thought I was doing well, I wanted that to be recognised. I wanted them to say to me, “well done, you're doing brilliant”. But that never really happened.

Was there a particular one of them that you wanted to impress the most?

No, I wouldn't say there was a particular one that I wanted to impress the most. It feels like the most senior is obviously Billy and Foxy. So I suppose Billy was quite tough on me, quite brutal on me. He was probably the toughest on me. Foxy had a bit of a soft spot for me. I think I made him laugh a little bit sometimes when he didn't want to laugh.

How did you feel having to fight Perri?

I'm just going to be completely open and honest. I was disappointed. I'd done quite a bit of boxing training beforehand so I was really disappointed because I wanted to use that exercise as a showcase, to show people that I actually can box a little bit and fight. People who would expect me to get battered, I wanted to show I could hold my own. So it was quite disappointing because when I was put against a female, I knew in my heart I wouldn't have it in me to fight her properly.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

It's the type of show that pushes you to breaking point and it's something I'll never forget, a once in a lifetime opportunity. It's a bucket list thing. I'm proud to say that I've done it. I did my very, very best. I'd say it's the hardest thing I've ever done, and I would say if you're going to do it, you need to prepare physically and mentally as much as you can. It's not a show that you can just turn up and walk on and think you're going to pass. You have to be ready for it. I'd say it's probably the most authentic show I've ever taken part in. You are living and breathing it 24 hours a day, you're not doing it for six hours and the rest you're talking to producers or you're chilling out. You're living and breathing it 24/7.

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TEDDY SOARES – RECRUIT NUMBER 3



Age: 26

From: London

Occupation: Reality TV Star

Teddy is the youngest of all the recruits. In 2021, Teddy finished third place on *Love Island* with his girlfriend Faye. When Teddy was 13, his dad passed away from cancer at the age of 42. After losing his dad at a young age, Teddy always looks for validation in other people as his dad was his rock. His mentality is very much “in the moment” and he is intrigued to see how he deals with SAS challenges when he is pushed outside of his comfort zone.

Why did you sign up to this show?

I suppose the decision to go on ***Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins*** came at a perfect time, I think, mentally I was in a space where confidence was an issue, I was feeling lost, and vulnerable. A lot of the things that I would be doing on a day to day, I would be almost seeking validation. When the decision to go on ***Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins*** came, it was like, "Okay, I'm going to do this one for me and go through the experience", because it's one of those experiences, having watched the show before, that is obviously gruelling, it's physically intense, but not only is it physically intense, it's really mentally intense as well. I just wanted to go through the pain really.

Did you feel like you had anything to prove?

Yes. I felt that I had a lot to prove to myself, that I don't actually need to seek validation from anyone. It's something that I'm really proud of, to be able to prove to myself that I can go the distance, I can push myself, and I can do things that are far out of my comfort zone.

Did you know anybody that'd done the show before?

Yeah. I spoke to **Pete Wicks**, who at the time actually was the worst person to speak to considering he broke his ribs, right? I just asked him, "Will I survive this if I end up going on it?" He just gave me the brutal, honest truth, that it's going to push me, and be expected to obviously be pushed out of my comfort zone, and just take every moment for what it is, and I definitely took that onboard.

Did you do any sort of physical prep before you went out there?

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Yes. I go to the gym Monday to Fridays, schedules permitting, but in terms of the way that I train, I don't tend to do long distance running or anything like that at all. That's the element of my workout that changed. I was on the treadmill, which was a pain in the ass, I'll be honest. I don't like doing long distance. Even in school, I loved sprinting, I was the 100-meter runner. 200 was a bit like, "Sir, do we really have to do 200 right now?" That was definitely a new thing for me. I enjoyed it. I surprised myself, because I actually really enjoyed running the distance and pushing myself mentally not to stop. I've got asthma, so it was kind of a shock to the system pushing myself to that limit. Then I knew that going on the show was definitely the right call for me, because it was exactly what I needed at the time to push myself.

You mentioned you can't swim, so was that the biggest fear going through your head when you were on the plane out there?

The nature scares me a lot, to be honest. When I eventually got the ticket and saw we were going to Vietnam, I thought, "Oh my goodness. Surely, there's different kinds of spiders out there, reptiles I've never seen before in my entire life." I've got a huge phobia of snakes, so that's something that I remember being on the plane asking about. Obviously, everyone was messing with me and telling me that there are. I was more worried about the creatures that I was going to see than whether I could cope in the water or not.

Going into the course, what did you think would be your strength and weaknesses?

I was definitely thinking that my weakness would be the long distance running. What kind of terrain am I going to be running across and how long am I going to be able to hold out? I honestly thought I would be the weakest link through the entire experience because of my asthma. I thought going into it that there would also be other people who would be way, way ahead of me - athletes, ex-footballers, and rugby players and God knows who else they were going to pull out of their hat. I think that was something that was at the back of my mind, but I quickly realised that at the end of the day, I'm here for me, I'm not really here to compete with anyone else. From that point of view, I really calmed myself down thinking that no matter what happens, no matter what point I end up leaving or staying, I'm just going to take this for what it is, experience each day as it comes, and just push myself as much as I can until something breaks.

What did you make of the rest of the line-up?

I support Arsenal, so when I saw **Jermaine Pennant**, I was like, "Oh my goodness. If I could do as much or anything close to anywhere near **Jermaine Pennant's** level, I'd be chuffed." I was almost fan boying, if that makes sense. Same thing with **Gareth Thomas**. When I saw **Gareth**, I thought, "Why are you here? I'm definitely not going to survive this!" At that point, I told them I was there for the ride, guys.

Did it raise the competitiveness within the ranks, having those sports stars amongst you?

Yeah. Definitely. I remember at one point thinking when **Jermaine** was running, I thought, "Okay, how far can I match you?" Especially from a football fan point of view. That for sure

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

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For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

raised the competitive edge for me, and also when we did murderball as well. I love sports, I love athletics and rugby and playing sports and really getting involved. I think **Gareth** was on the opposite side. He was on the other team. Going up against someone like **Gareth**, call me stupid, but rather than actually thinking, "I need to go the other direction", I was thinking, "How hard can I get hit by **Gareth**?" I really got involved! I think within the camp, I don't know, I might be speaking for myself, but everyone really pushed each other in a weird way. It wasn't like a nasty competitive streak. It was more of everyone is here for their own reasons, and we want to get to a certain point and we all developed that bond. It was a good competitive streak.

What were the DS like?

The DS really, really reminded me of my childhood, to be honest, because my dad was really disciplined in terms of, "Do this, do that, make sure your bed is done when you get out of bed." If you don't do it, all hell breaks loose, right? I genuinely thought, "Jesus, I'm being parented again" but on a completely different scale!

Did they say anything to get under your skin?

Yeah, definitely. More emotionally, though. I'm quite an emotional guy, more than the guy that says, "I want to scrap someone." I know I shed a tear a few times on that show. They definitely got under my skin. But more in I would say a positive way, because it really showed me that when you actually listen to someone and they are making sense and they are connecting to things that you're experiencing at the time, it's unbelievable. I think what they do is it's impressive to be able to somehow scream at you but make it seem like it's to help you.

Did you have a particular DS that you wanted to impress the most?

Yes. I really, really wanted to impress Chris. I don't know if it's the accent. I don't know what it is but I felt like if I'd let Chris down, I was letting down one of my brothers. I remember not quite doing a task well, the way he spoke to me and knowing that I'd let him down just made me feel like I have to do better. There was just this level of wanting to do better or wanting to improve in the next task, and going away, really reflecting on why I didn't do well in the last task.

How did you feel having to fight Gareth Gates?

The fighting surprised me actually. To be honest, I went through an unconscious, weird state of mind when I put on the gloves and I was up against Gareth, right? I kind of thought, "Okay, what have I seen in other boxing matches and movies that I've watched? What can I replicate to win this?" One of the things that was really running through my mind, before I even knew I was fighting Gareth is I really hope that I don't have to fight one of the ladies, I was thinking to myself, "Oh, no. I'm going to have to be up against one of the ladies and I'm not going to be able to do it. I actually won't categorically be able to do it." Then when they paired me with Gareth I was like, "Right. I'm now in this and I want to win. I don't want to lose. I don't want to get battered, so I'm just going to go for it."

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

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For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

How would you sum up the whole experience?

The whole experience was overwhelming, and as I say, for me, it was one of the experiences that I will never, ever be able to live down. I think I would recommend loosely, I'm going to say this is very loosely, I'd recommend it to a lot of people who are going through something in life and they don't really have a get-out, because there's a lot of tension that can be released mentally, physically, and, personally, again, I'm going to say this loosely, I would actually do it again, because it was something that changed my life.

MICHELLE HEATON – RECRUIT NUMBER 4



Age 43

From: Newcastle

Occupation: Singer

Eighteen months sober, she is passionate to help others and hopes to show viewers that people can overcome addictions and take on the biggest of challenges. Michelle thinks that people have bad perceptions of her. She wants to prove that by doing this course, people will see that not everyone in the industry is spoilt. She works hard and she hasn't had things thrown at her. Her biggest fear is hurting herself that'll mean she won't be able to come home and care for her children.

It's the toughest show on the telly, what made you sign up?

I do love a challenge. And pre, I suppose getting sober, I was lucky enough to go on numerous expeditions, trekking through Morocco, the Atlas Mountains. I've done the foothills in the Himalayas. And that all stopped when I was getting better and COVID. So I suppose I've been getting itchy feet. And the year previous, I really wanted to do it. I really wanted to get involved, so put my name forward, and it was just too soon into recovery for me to be considered. And that was definitely the right reason, now looking back. And so now was just the right time for everything really.

Did you know what you were letting yourself in for?

Yeah, I love the show. I love watching it. Loads of my friends have already done it before. I got some mixed feedback from them but I just thought that it's a challenge beyond no other, and I'm never going to be able to have this opportunity again. So when it was actually presented to me that it could happen, or it might happen, then I was up for it.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

What advice did Kerry and Ulrika give you?

I think the advice from my friends at that point was that they didn't realise how much of a mental thing it was going to be.

Did you feel like you had anything to prove?

Just to myself, me. I'm in competition with just myself. And it was the best challenge ever. So it was really only me I had something to prove to, no one else.

Did you do any preparation beforehand?

I am a very physical person. I go to the gym a lot, and I work out a lot, and I do a lot of high impact stuff. For me it was the endurance, I suppose, that I was lacking. And I prepared for it by going out hiking with my boots on. You get your boots early on, but I was not prepared for doing it with a backpack that weighed 15 kilos and we all had to carry that weight no matter how small we were. I still can't get my head around how me and Melinda were given the same weight to carry as **Gareth Thomas**. It's obviously going to make a massive difference, 15 kilos is a quarter of my body weight!

Is there anything that surprised you about the course?

I think the biggest thing for me, what I was surprised about was how I wasn't able to factor in the time restraints of when they say they need you down in that two, three minutes. Usually I'm never late, and I am really good at setting myself goals. But for some reason, I don't know whether it's my age, a bit of menopause, whatever it might be, I just wasn't ultimately a hundred percent ready on time. And I was punished for that! I had to go into the sewage water and dump my whole self, with the 15 kilo bag on my back, because I didn't have my water bottle filled up. I was really desperately trying to do everything that they really wanted me to do. And it wasn't deliberate. It wasn't, "oh I don't care. Oh they won't check that". I really wanted to make it work. And something just wasn't clicking.

What was your biggest fear about starting the course?

I suppose getting injured is one of those things that you fear, that injury puts you out before you're able to reach your full potential.

What would you say your strengths and weaknesses were going into the course?

I feel like actually mentally, I was quite strong. Physically, I know I'm fit, but I'm small. I'm only five foot four. And I knew that my height and my weight, not because I'm underweight, but I'm a small person, might be an issue going forward in some of the tasks. But I was quietly confident, because I love pushing myself as well. And that's what I think my strengths were. I wouldn't give up. I knew I wouldn't say no to anything.

How do you cope being pushed out of your comfort zone?

I'm kind of a thrill seeker, so I like being out of my comfort zone. And even though I do like, in some ways, order and I like to know what I'm doing, each day, what the plan is, X, Y, Z. I look at when it's spontaneous, and then not knowing, and then reacting to whatever that situation is. And that's what the whole experience of **Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins** is about. You really have no idea. I felt like I was prepared in some way, but you have no idea how unprepared you are when it comes to things being thrown at you. And obviously, not everything's going to be shown on TV. The sleep deprivation is real! And the conditions, I

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

knew it wouldn't be luxury anyway, and I knew the beds would be bunk beds. And I've done worse, I've slept in way worse when I've done things in Southern India and Himalayas. But you can't grasp the heat, the rain, the foot rot, should I say, and the conditions in which you have to change in so quickly. And we were always wet. It takes its toll.

What did you think of all the other celebrities you were going to be with?

I was delighted. I knew a couple of them. **Gareth Gates** is a very close friend to me. I knew **Danielle Lloyd** very well. I knew **Siva** a little bit, but got to know him better on this.

Montana is somebody who I know of. And so I was really excited about getting to know everybody. And **Melinda** and I have known each other for years as well.

What about Matt Hancock?

I am totally and utterly able to set aside any outside opinions or any actual other opinions until I meet somebody. And that's what we all did. So I think I'm speaking on behalf of everybody, when it comes to anybody who we met on the show, we took them as we met them. There was no pretences. It wasn't like that at all. I think we were all there to do one thing. We didn't know what was happening. We were all excited, in the same boat. And I do believe that the morale and the connections that we all had were really genuine.

What did you make of the DS?

They're really lovely, right? Really lovely. And then as soon as we start filming they're really in my face, I'm like, "Oh my God, what just happened?" They're in full military mode.

How did it feel having them shouting at you?

When you watch something, like when I did **Big Brother**, or something like that, you watch it at home and go, "Don't be so silly, of course you know there's cameras there," that kind of thing. When you are there, it isn't about that. The cameras and the production do not get involved whatsoever. You can't talk to them, they don't talk to you. They're just there. So it becomes almost like they're invisible. You do actually forget that the cameras are there. And you are just faced with these men who are shouting and telling you to do stuff.

Did you want to impress a particular DS?

I think for me, my respect was for all of them. But definitely, I think it's more so for Billy and Foxy, I think it's just because of the time that they've been on the show. And everybody knows them. I think I was more scared of Billy than anybody else, in a way that you could see that he's there for a reason. And he just oozes authority. His presence automatically makes you sit up straight. And then with Chris, because he was new, and he was Geordie, I knew I lost my inhibitions with Chris. I think that was my downfall with him, because I thought he was a friend, just because he was from Newcastle. And that's not what happens on SAS, they're not your friends. That's when you get thrown around!

How did you find tackling the traverse?

I just did awful. I'm not scared of heights at all. I thought I was really confident. I went up the ladder, I was like, "absolutely fine, this is great, it's an act of balance". And I just started running! For some reason I just ran over these steel bars and absolutely decked it. And I remember Foxy shouting, "Who the f*ck do you think you are, Linford Christie?" But just

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

then, it was like in that moment of fight or flight, for some reason my mind told me to run. And it was an absolute wrong decision. I definitely got no bonus points on that one!

Did you have a laugh in camp with the others?

Oh, God yes. Even though I did take it very seriously, and I didn't take the p*ss, and I was respectful, I also can't deal with not having a laugh. So there were definitely moments of laughter. I remember **Gareth Thomas** carrying **Melinda's** backpack. I almost gave him mine as well. There was just this camaraderie that makes the whole experience even better. We all felt it at times. And with that brought laughter. And with pain, there was joy.

How did you keep spirits up in the camp when obviously you're being beasted constantly?

We were all in there for the same reason. We're all doing the same things. We have no idea what's coming to us. And I think the friendships that we had grew so quickly because we had to. And we just trusted each other because we're all in the same boat. And everybody had their spirits up. I remember Matt saying to me and Melinda how strong we were, and we've got this, and to just go for it. And at the beginning, Danielle and I were having conversations. She wasn't sure that she wanted to continue at the beginning. And I gave her a pep talk. It's amazing how positive we kept ourselves going, considering the horrendous circumstances!

How would you sum up the whole experience?

Oh gosh. Do you know, what's really weird is that I loved it. Am I a bit weird? I loved it because it put me in situations that I would never put myself in normally. It got me to think outside the box. It got me uncomfortable. And I think it's good to get uncomfortable sometimes, because then you realise your limitations. And I made really good friends from it. We had a good bunch of people, and I'm really looking forward to everybody seeing what happened.

JERMAINE PENNANT – RECRUIT NUMBER 5



Age: 40

From: Nottingham

Occupation: Ex-Premier League Footballer

As a professional footballer, Jermaine has made over 350 appearances for 15 clubs and scored 25 goals. Known as the bad boy footballer, he regularly hit the headlines for his drink driving antics.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Having a very troubled upbringing and lots of childhood trauma, Jermaine wants to use the SAS course to face his fears and get over demons and trauma he has previously been battling with. Bad decisions in his career have led to bad mistakes.

This is the toughest show on TV, why did you say yes to it?

Very good question! Well, one, you underestimate how brutal it actually is until your body's going through it. Obviously being an ex-professional footballer, I've done a lot of pre-seasons, a lot of fitness training, put my body through a lot of strain, but this obviously was on a different scale, total different. So I thought, "Yeah, I'll be all right. It might be hard, but I'll be ok". I shouldn't have gone in with that mentality.

Were you training in any particular way beforehand to prepare for the course?

I was doing prep. I was doing training. I was running in boots, uphill, downhill, certain terrains with a backpack on, which was about 20 kg. So I was preparing. But there were things out there that you can't prepare for. Those didn't matter. It doesn't matter how much training you do, and you can't put yourself through what the DS have put you through. It's not only what they always make you do, it was the terrain, the conditions. That's what you can't prepare for. But obviously I was in probably the best shape I could have been in. But again, it doesn't matter how fit you are, once you are doing what you have to do in that terrain, it puts pressure on anyone.

Was there anyone who'd taken part before, who you asked advice from before joining the course?

Yeah, I've known a few people who've been on the show before, but I've more or less just watched the show over the years. I was contemplating beforehand which climate we'd be in, and which one would I'd prefer, hot or cold terrain. But now I've been in Vietnam, I'm going to say I'd prefer the cold. It's easy to warm your body up and then keep your body cool!

What would you say your strengths and weaknesses were going into the course?

I would say my strength was definitely helping others, I'm a team player. And obviously my strength was my endurance and fitness to a certain degree. My weaknesses, well, I did not have any at the time, but it was probably the heat.

How would you rate your mental strengths?

I know that I can handle and deal with a lot. I thought I was mentally resilient from what I've been through, what I've endured from childhood until adult life. It helped me mentally prepare and just think deep.

When it comes to your comfort zone, are you somebody who relishes being pushed out of it?

I think everybody likes to stay in the comfort zone. Once you start getting into foreign territory, it is very uncomfortable. For anyone, it doesn't matter what you've endured, that terrain is very, very uncomfortable. Surroundings, where I was living, the food, it was difficult to take on. Every time I had a mouth full of rice I started to gag. It was that

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards
uncomfortable. But like I said, because you're not on your own, everybody else is going through that as well. You just have to keep going.

What do you make of the DS?

Well, first of all, I've got to take my hat off to them for what they have done and also just living in that world. That's their specialty, and they've gone through that for years and years of training. I've gone for a week and I was like, "Oh geez, how do you do that? They're clever too. They can spot weaknesses. They can spot strengths just by looking at somebody!"

What's it like when they're screaming at you and they're in your face trying to push all your buttons?

Yeah, it is difficult, you don't want them in front of you. But you've literally got to keep your mouth shut and apologise. And you see why some people do crack, do break, do retaliate, and ultimately get the team punished.

Was there a DS who you particularly wanted to impress?

It's all of them really. If you get any chance to impress them all, you want to impress them all. But obviously Billy was the main man. He was always talking. He was the main one who was giving out punishments and whatnot. And then Foxy as well. It is all of them. You want to impress all of them. If you're getting a chance to impress, impress them.

What did you think when you saw who you'd be on the course with?

I thought it was a mixed bag. I thought it's going to be interesting. It was definitely some raised eyebrows with some. But I think it was a good group and I'm sure everyone learned a lot and got a lot from the show.

What did you think about Matt Hancock being there?

That was definitely a wow moment! I think not only for me but for everyone involved in the show, I guess. You wouldn't put a politician of his nature into such a demanding experience. But we didn't know what to expect really. We had to go in there with a blank canvas. Because if we would've gone in there with what the nation already perceived him to be, I don't think it would've benefited the team.

Did having so many sports stars in the line-up ramp up the competitiveness within camp?

Yes it did. I felt like, "well I've got to show my strength here. I've got to try and top these lot," because they're all up there as the front runners because of their athleticism. I thought, I've got to pull my weight, where before usually it's just a one sport star, they maybe can cruise for it, but now I have to make sure that I was able to be the best of them because there was some good front-runners in this group, which was a bit harsh on me!

You take on the trainasium in the first episode, what was that like?

I've not really got a fear of heights like some people have. So I just thought just try and go for it. Just master every exercise that we've got to do, every task that we've got to do. But it was difficult. I wasn't really using the right technique and I kept bouncing, it was hard. That was a tough one. But it was only hard in terms of not falling. It wasn't difficult in terms of fears, some of the others were terrified of heights.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Did you have a laugh in camp?

Yeah, so many touching and amazing moments. When I was on lookout with Arg, we had a little giggle about things. Gareth, he was just constantly hilarious in the camp when we were back in our bunk, just chilling. There were so many little things that we did have fun and have a laugh with. And as I said there was a great, great group of celebs that I was with.

How would you sum up the experience?

I'd say it's like no other. If someone's going to get an opportunity to do it, I would tell them - be prepared. It's going to be tough, but it can be life changing. If you go in there with a mindset that you want to push yourself, you want to see where you are mentally, you want to see what you can handle and what you want to get from it, or you want to get past any trauma, any demons that you've been holding onto throughout your life, this will strip everything away from you. If you go with a good mindset, it can be life-changing.

PERRI SHAKES-DRAYTON – RECRUIT NUMBER 6



Age: 34

From: London

Occupation: Great British Olympian

Best known for her 4x400m hurdles, her biggest achievement was winning gold with her team in 2012. Perri is not a quitter and having various injuries throughout her career, she is a lot more cautious nowadays, however this doesn't stop her from doing things to extremes. Now, she wants to share her hugely inspiring story about never giving up. She loves food and admits that if she hasn't eaten she can get incredibly hangry!

Why did you sign up for the show?

I signed up because I watch the show and I've been like, "I wonder if I could do this?" Being honest, I'm a fan of the show. So I've seen other people doing it and wanted to give it a go. When I got the call, without even knowing where I was going or anything, I thought, "I'm going to do it!"

Did you feel like you had anything to prove?

No. Nothing to prove. But I've got expectations on myself, or people who had expectations of me, being an athlete, coming from that background, I just knew that I didn't want to leave on the first day! That was kind of my thing, and as long as my body was fine, I would have no issues and I believed I could go a long way.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Did you do any preparation for the course?

No, I wasn't training for a competition or anything, I had a baby, so my body had changed. I had a basic fitness level but never went above and beyond the point where was doing specific types of training. None of that. I just put my boots on, put weights in my rucksack and kept moving. That was pretty much it!

As a fan of the show, you knew what you were letting yourself into?

Yes, there were certain things that were like, "I hope they don't have me do this. I hope they don't have me do that." One thing, jumping off a helicopter. I was like, "please don't make me do that." When I found out that it wasn't happening, that put a smile on my face!

Did you know anyone who's done the show before you could ask for advice?

Yeah, so I know **Dwain Chambers**. I reached out and you're not even meant to let people know you're going on it, right? So I said, "So, tell me about it!" He was like, "You're going in aren't you?" He was like, "Listen to me, our training isn't going to help us. Athletic training is not as helpful as you think it's going to be." Bear in mind let me just put this, Dwain is a sprinter. Sprinters don't like to do distance stuff. That endurance stuff, whereas with my training, I had to do all that. So when I hear about how many miles you have to do, I was like, "Yeah I can do this." I've definitely got a long-distance background that's going to help! I've got this!

What would you say was your biggest fear about doing the course?

Well, apart from the helicopter, it was the food situation! I was not looking forward to what I was about to put myself through in terms of food because I know the food would affect my mood.

What would you say your strengths were going to be?

My strengths, mentally I think I'm strong. That competitive edge I have as an athlete. That's what I feel gives me that little edge. I've been through tougher things. I had an injury that put me out for so long. I know how it feels when your body's not one hundred percent and you still push through things. That's what I feel like my little secret weapon was. Because when I did start having pain in my feet, that's when all hell broke out, but I was still pushing though. I was still pushing with my mashed up feet in that jungle.

What do you think your weakness would be?

It was going first in the challenges. Quite a few times I was picked to go first and the fear kind of gets you because you've got nothing to compare it to by watching others do it first. There was one challenge I failed because I was making too much noise. But that was the fear that had got hold of me.

What did you think of the rest of the celebrity line up?

Look, you're not going to get chosen for this course if you're rubbish, we were all chosen for a reason. So I was looking more at the physical aspects, and they all looked good! I had that competitive part of me kick in with the girls, because they were all good. With the boys I was even more competitive, I'm like, "Sorry, I could smoke you, some of you". But then with some there's no chance, like, "Oh yeah, you can't beat me". Men are definitely stronger than women in some cases, I mean, Gareth Thomas is a unit!

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

What did you make of the DS?

I could have got myself in trouble at times because I was laughing. Some of the insults were hilarious, I was cracking up. At one point Billy was like, "You need to get in the show because you stink!" It's hard not to laugh because they're very witty!

Are they intimidating?

No, they're not intimidating, I didn't think that was going to be the case. I didn't find it intimidating, if anything I wanted them to respect me for what I was about to do. At any challenge, I want to show you what I can do, so it was more that. I respect what they've done, seriously, because what we did was only a small percentage of what they've had to go through for real. You can't help but admire that. I'm not going to lie, when they were beasting us I was cussing them in my mind, I'm tired, achy, I didn't want to be there. Leave me alone. But I can't say that to them because I'm just going to have to do more, so in my head I'm like, "shut up, I'm doing it, ain't I?" You have to bite your lip and just get on with it. But I really wanted to impress them.

What was it like having to fight Arg?

I loved it, oh my gosh! Okay, bearing in mind, I hadn't had a fight before. Maybe my brother when we were younger. But I've never had a fight with a stranger!

They also gassed you, what was that like?

It was horrible. I panicked, it was stinging, my face was stinging. Couldn't breathe, I didn't like being in that environment. I didn't care that I lost it either because I was suffering. You can't really explain what it does to you, it's just sheer panic. All sense goes out of the window. I remember getting out and all I wanted was water because it was burning.

Did you enjoy murderball?

That game was so good! That game was a bit of me. Of course it made it harder because it was mud, and you're getting stuck. But it got aggressive, it was a wrestling match. That was one of my faves. In the other challenges you don't really have control, but this one you have control, you can grab, you can pull, you can throw. You know you have to grow some balls and get stuck in!

Did you have a laugh in camp?

Oh yeah! I loved it. We had so much fun in camp. We'd play a game, charades or something like that? Then I got to talk to people and find out a little bit more about them. I was put in amongst a group of people who I probably wouldn't have crossed paths with, that I got to know a bit more about them, and they were all good fun.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

Wow. A very proud moment. It was an incredible experience from start to finish, there's so many words I can use to describe it. I loved every minute of it. If you're thinking about doing it, just say yes! My only advice would be to make sure you break your boots in before you go!

GARETH GATES – RECRUIT NUMBER 7

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards



Age: 38

From: Yorkshire

Occupation: Singer/Songwriter

Gareth rose to fame in 2002, when he was the runner-up on *Pop Idol*. Throughout his career, he has been the victim of tabloid news, he has shied away from the press and would like to use the process to build his confidence and show who he is now. Still affected with his stammer which he has had since birth, Gareth uses breathing exercises to help control it but believes it has made him mentally resilient to anything thrown at him.

Why did you want to take part in this series?

When it comes to programmes on TV, I've been asked to do all sorts of reality shows over the years, and I tend to shy away from them. The only shows I've ever done, obviously *Pop Idol*, when I first came to fame, I didn't even want to do that. I had to be forced really by my mum to do it, just purely because I knew that I'd have to talk in front of cameras. But fortunately that turned out okay for me. Then the only other show I've ever done is *Dancing on Ice*. Again, that was a skill. It was something you had to learn. I've always been quite competitive. I've learned to play the guitar, the piano as a kid. Practice and repetition is just in my blood into my veins. I was asked to do this and I'd seen a few episodes in the past. It just really intrigued me. I absolutely knew that I'd be stretched both physically and mentally.

Did you feel like you had anything to prove?

Yes, absolutely. But only to myself. The very reason why I've said no to other TV shows in the past is I definitely wasn't doing it for fame or for more exposure even. The whole thing just really intrigued me and I was actually there to prove to myself I was physically enough to do and also mentally strong enough to get through it.

You look like you're in great shape for it?

That was something I certainly had to look at. I'm naturally very, very skinny. Just look back at the four from *Pop Idol*. I'm really slim, very lean. Since training, my objective has always been to put weight on and to bulk up as much as possible. It's taken years and years to even get to the size I am now. I still want to be bigger. I've always been quite fit anyway, but I've always been predominantly weights, weights, weights. I tried to really bulk up, but for this, I

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

really had to change a few things. I had to do a lot more cardio, a lot more hit training just to get my stamina up.

Did you know anybody that had done the show before that you could call for advice?

Yeah, **Jennifer Ellison**. I chatted to her quite a bit in the lead up to me going out there. She helped me through it. Then in the series I did, actually the year before, I'd done Panto with Gareth Thomas in Cardiff. I've obviously known Michelle Heaton for years and years. We were around at the same time in the charts. We go back. So it was really nice for me to have a couple of faces I knew in there. I was really scared about my speech with new people and certainly under very hostile environments. I absolutely knew I was going to struggle speech wise and it was really great. I had two people in there I could cozy up to.

Did it make it super competitive when you look around and you see all these sport stars and Olympians in the line up?

It was only then that it hit me when I saw those people, especially Gareth Thomas. I mean, he's a unit. I've never seen anybody as big and athletic as him. Wow. He's this Adonis! What did you think your strengths and weaknesses were going to be on the course? Well, straight in with the weaknesses, obviously the interrogation if I got there. That's a huge part of the show. I literally thought there's absolutely no chance I'll be able to answer their questions. Well, in a funny way, I thought it'd be hard for them to get any info on me, so that's fine. But the chat that you have with the DS in the mirror room, I absolutely knew that would be extremely hard for me speech wise. That was my main fear. I think strengths for me, obviously, the fitness side of things. I absolutely knew I was going to be up there amongst some of the fittest.

What did you make of the DS?

They're very, very tough people. That's the thing I really got from them. Yes, tough physically, but I don't even mean that. I mean, just very strong and tough people in every area. They've had to witness things, they've had to experience things that we'll never experience. It was also a real sense of respect as well for me. I massively respected them and although it was a TV show, it's so immersive, it's so real that I actually treated it as though it was absolutely real. Just seeing how tough they were, hearing everything that they've seen, heard and experienced. I just had respect for them and I think that really helped me really stay present and respect the show and respect them.

What's it like when they're screaming at you?

That was definitely hard for me. There were times that my speech was at its worst when either before a task or after a task where they'd be in your face even asking me questions or really drilling you. That actually really got to me and my speech was at its worst then. Obviously, the lack of sleep and food and being tired in every way definitely didn't help my speech, but them screaming in your face definitely doesn't help that.

How did you find having to fight Teddy Soares?

I am really not a fighter at all. I didn't have a clue how to fight. In hindsight and after the whole thing, I should have really just ploughed in, but I didn't. I was trying to sort of box and I've never boxed, so I was trying to duck and dive and I didn't have a clue what I was doing! Whereas Teddy did, and he has boxed before as a kid. He knew exactly what he was doing.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

He literally picked me up every time. The DS are like, "Keep on going, keep on going." But these things make us tougher and it's certainly something since the programme that I've actually learned a bit more about and pursuing just because I was so bad at it!

Were there any challenges that you particularly enjoyed?

Yeah, we abseiled through this cave that I haven't ever seen a cave like it. It was just unreal. So deep and a vast drop, yet you are inside in a cave. You'd expect heights like that from a mountain outside but not inside. It was just the most incredible thing. Things like that, people feared those that have a fear of heights, but I loved it! We had to do a shooting challenge which was great. I literally felt like James Bond. I just really enjoyed that. Again, those that excelled at those challenges were those that took instructions and listened and I think that's a strength of mine. It wasn't only just about being the toughest or the fittest, it is also about taking instructions.

Did you have a laugh in camp with the others?

Yeah! Through not being very good at speaking, I'm actually really good at the game of Charades. So we played that a lot. I think I must have instigated just to try and make friends within the group because I excel at Charades. We were all playing and there was actually a moment when it was Matt Hancock's turn and he did a book. I say, "Oh, the Bible." It was the answer! From then, we had a bit of a connection and we just laughed our way through that. That was a nice moment.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

Just life-changing and very humbling. We went through that for a few days and to know that there's guys that go out and do this for real and sacrifice their lives for us to have the freedom that we have. Those were the thoughts that were in my head throughout the whole experience. I was really quite humbled by the DS and the thought that people actually really do this. Life changing, but very humbling.

MONTANA BROWN – RECRUIT NUMBER 8



Age: 27

From: London

Occupation: Reality TV Star

Montana shot to fame when she was an islander on the 3rd series of *Love Island* in 2017. In 2019, Montana lost one of her best friends and fellow Love Islander Mike Thalassitis, who sadly died by suicide at the age of 26. Over the past couple of years, Montana has done a lot of work on her self-worth and mindset. By doing the SAS course, she wants to

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

see if she can control her mind in challenging situations and put things into perspective when she is under that amount of pressure.

Why did you want to do this show?

I think just in general life, most people are quite comfortable, everyone's in their own routine, get up, have breakfast, whatever. Most people live quite a scheduled life and everything's quite within their comfort zone. So, obviously when this opportunity came around I just thought I can't say no. It's such an opportunity to push yourself mentally and physically to the edge. I kind of just was really curious as to how I was going to react to being so far out my comfort zone, and also doing things that I really don't want to do.

Did you do any preparation for the show?

I did a little bit of training. Obviously, they don't tell you the location of where you're going. The main thing that I was worried about is my upper body strength, which is something that I'm not really used to training that often. So yeah, I was doing weighted vest walks and I was finding it very difficult. Oh my god. I was like, this is going to be every day. Also, I was going for a leisurely stroll at my own pace and I was really out of breath and stopping when I wanted to stop. My partner was like, "Come on. This is not going to be in any way like it's going to be there. You need to be running." I said, "No, I don't want to run. I don't want to put myself out." It was just a classic example of me just not really pushing myself. So yeah, that was the most preparation that I did is used a weighted vest and went for walks!

Did you know anybody that had done the show before that you could ask for advice?

I do know people that have done it beforehand. Camilla did it, from Love Island. My other friend, Jeremy Irvine, did it. So, I've heard from their experiences. I remember I went around to Jeremy's house and I was like, "Tell me everything." So I kind of had an idea how awful it was going to be, but I don't feel like it would ever really truly match up to how scary it was going to be in person.

What advice did he give?

Jeremy loved it but I knew he's very different to me. He's very self-motivated. He goes on YouTube and builds his house for fun, and he thinks that's fun. I knew that we were not very aligned in those kind of things that he likes to do anyway, so I knew that he probably would have enjoyed it way more. I don't like being outside of my comfort zone and I really don't like to do things that I'm not already good at. Because I'm quite sporty, I'd say, and I'm quite competitive, so if I'm not naturally good at something I just veer away from it. I'm like, right, well I'm not doing that again because I can't win at it. His advice was just suck it up and just keep your head down and don't talk back to them, don't have an attitude. Which I feel like is very good advice.

What was your biggest fear ahead of starting the course?

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

I really just don't like the sea, because obviously I've watched the series before and I'd seen them jumping out the helicopter into the sea. I think that would've been awful if that had been one of the tasks, and I was really concerned that it was going to be something like that because I think I would really struggle. Especially when I'm nervous, I feel like I struggle taking on information. There is a moment in one of the episodes where I was so busy panicking that I didn't listen to what the challenge was at all. I couldn't even concentrate on what someone was saying to me because I was like, "I'm so scared." Not listening at all, my body was freaking out. So, yeah, I think that was the main thing, being in the sea.

What would you say your strengths and weaknesses were going to be on the course?

So, I thought my strengths would be physically, I knew I'd be able to do fitness stuff. I've always done sports throughout my life, I've always been quite into going to the gym. I've always been quite active, so I felt out of anybody, I feel like I'd feel quite confident that my ability to do those things, I would be able to do it. Not that I'd want to do it or enjoy doing it, but I knew my body was capable of doing those challenges. So, I'd say physically I felt like that would be a strength for me. My weakness was always going to be probably the less skilled things, but the more scary elements of it. And being able to tune in and to ignore the noise of being scared and having to listen to instruction. I genuinely thought that was probably going to be the hardest thing for me. Running in a straight line and following other people and doing a few pushups, that doesn't seem scary to me. But actually where you're at risk of it being quite dangerous, and obviously there were so many situations where if you do something wrong you are in danger of hurting yourself. You're on the edge of a cliff, you're at the top of a mountain. Those things I was more worried about.

How would you rate your mental strength?

I would say that mentally I have quite good mental resilience, but I don't know. I was a bit worried because, again, it's hard to put it into perspective because obviously none of these challenges are any challenges that you could ever even compare to anything in everyday life. I think that was why I was most nervous, because I just knew that nothing I was going to experience was going to be normal and I had nothing to compare it to.

What did you think when you saw who you were going to be with on the course?

Do you know what? I really loved everybody. I'd met some people before. I had done some bits with *Sports Relief* with **Gareth Thomas**, I had obviously met **Amber Turner** at events. **Arg**, obviously I knew from just events and things like that. But I just loved the group of people we were with, genuinely. Everyone was so lovely and everyone was just so amazing. Even on those first few days of getting to know each other, they can be really nerve-wracking, but I just felt like I really gelled with everybody and I really, really loved getting to know everybody.

What did you make of the DS?

Oh my god. Do you know what? I've just never been shouted at like that in my whole life. It was so weird to me that they actually see people like that all the time. I didn't know how to

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

react. I've never had someone scream in my face before. You know when things upset you, but in that moment if someone shouts at you, you feel like you could cry? I felt like I was going to have one of those moments. But it was so weird. I think because it was never really targeted at me, I was really lucky. Obviously, they did shout at me on odd occasions. I never really put a foot too far out of line.

Who did you want to impress the most?

I think just all of them. I think I'm a little bit of a people pleaser. I don't like to be disliked just in general. And so, I really wanted them to think I was hardworking. I think that was kind of also, it was a big part of the whole show was proving to myself that I could do it. But I really wanted to do them proud, and just for them to think that I could actually have a shot of being in the SAS.

Were there any challenges you enjoyed?

Not that I enjoyed it, but there's a challenge where we're walking across poles, a million miles in the air. I definitely didn't enjoy it because I was also one of the last people to do it, so I felt like I was really anxious about it. But I was really proud of myself for achieving that because I'd seen so many people fail doing it.

Did you have a laugh in camp with the other celebs?

I have so many amazing memories of that experience. It was so incredible. I used to chat so much to Zoe and Gareth. I remember I made everyone play Charades. Some people were like, "Please stop." But we just had such a laugh. We were playing Charades and Gareth Gates was amazing at Charades. I just loved making friends with everybody.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

I would sum up the experience as genuinely up there as one of the best moments and one of the best experiences in my life. I've never been to Vietnam. What a better way to experience it. We were literally at the top of some random mountain at the top of Vietnam. It was just one of the best experiences I've ever done. People pay to do those kinds of experiences. We just were so lucky. So yeah, I just guess an experience of a lifetime.

JON-ALLAN BUTTERWORTH MBE – RECRUIT NUMBER 9



Age: 37

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

From: Manchester

Occupation: Paralympic Gold Medalist

At the age of 21, Jon-Allan lost his left arm in a rocket attack when serving as a senior aircraftman with the RAF in Iraq. He is the first British Military athlete to win a gold medal in cycling. Taking on the SAS course will give him the opportunity to show other people with a disability to think outside the box and that they can take on a challenge. "Losing my arm was the best thing that ever happened to me".

Why did you want to do this show?

Well, basically to challenge myself. Since my injury, I've always sought out new challenges. I was at the time in my life where I could challenge myself with something new.

For people who don't know, how did you lose your arm?

So I joined the Air Force at 16 and basically trained to be a weapons engineer. It was in Iraq where I got injured in 2007. So I got injured from indirect fire, a mortar going into the base where I was working. The injury was quite severe, major arterial bleed, but didn't amputate the arm fully from the blast radius, it kind of explodes with the shrapnel. I was in Basra in Iraq for five days before being flown out. Medically I wasn't stable enough to travel at first. And then after five days, I got transferred back to the UK to start, where I basically had lots of operations, and then rehab.

Your injury hasn't held you back because you've had a phenomenal athletic career since...

Yeah, until it happened, I don't think I knew that I had it in myself. I would never have been the type that would've ever done sports. I'd probably just still be doing military tasks, I might have changed jobs inside the military, I had aspirations to become a pilot. I think until something like this happens, you don't know your true capability. You don't really know what you're able to achieve. I suppose my sporting career goes hand in hand with the fact that I just wanted to keep busy and keep active and try a new challenge. Then took the attitude of basically, just try it. There are things that I struggle with, not many things, but there's loads of things I haven't even tried yet. So you don't know if you can do it until you try. That's one of my mottos in life is, just try it. Also, try not to be scared of failure. I don't like failing and I don't deal with failure very well but that still hasn't stopped me from trying new things.

Did you feel like you had anything to prove on the course?

I suppose there's something at the back of my head that the reputation of the RAF is generally that you're a civilian in a blue suit, in a way that when you say, "Oh, I was in the military." And they find out you're RAF, they kind of go, "Oh, well, that's not the real military." You're basically a civilian. Because generally they're not in harm's way, they're normally in air bases sending aircraft off to go and do their missions, we're normally quite safe. Our living conditions aren't as bad, I suppose easier than it is in the army. So I suppose I kind of wanted to show that someone from the RAF can cut it out there. Obviously, I'm just

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

as new to this as the other celebrities on the show. Yes, I did basic training but I went straight to be an engineer. I didn't want to be treated any different, like you should know how to do this, or, you should be better because you've done it before. I haven't done it before! I won't ever try and pretend that I'm something that I'm not.

Did you want to show the audience that a disability doesn't need to hold you back?

Yeah, exactly. I do know that a lot of the things we were doing requires two hands. It's difficult I think because most challenges I can overcome and adapt, given time and being able to think about the problem. And normally I problem solve quite quickly, but in this, we didn't have the time or luxury, it was just getting stuck in. But you just adapt. So for example, I can tie my shoelaces one-handed, but it takes me time, which I didn't have in there. So I just asked for help. That's not a bad thing, that's making a smart decision to get the best outcome. I just explain what I'm doing so that people then don't see me as a victim. I could have gone the opposite way and expect people to do things for me, but I never take the easy route. But equally I'm not ashamed to ask for help when I need it.

Did you do any physical preparation for the show?

Yeah, a little bit. So the timescale was obviously quite abrupt, and I already had a holiday booked. So I went to Greece for a week and did some swimming in the pool there. I had access to that, which was good, which I did a little bit of everyday, just enough to get some basic fitness done. I broke my boots in. I didn't overly do it, I probably did something every day, whether it be a long walk with a rucksack on with a bit of weight in, or slight jogging with some weights. So I'd do a little bit of prep, but obviously we only had four weeks to prep, and I knew that you can't get fit for this in just four weeks.

What do you think your strengths and weaknesses would be on the course?

I think different sort of weaknesses in terms of having to carry things like equipment or boxes, not having two arms to hold items, that was always going to be an issue. I felt good mentally, in terms of I didn't think I would get to any challenge and feel mentally it'd be too much for me, or I would fall to bits. I think mentally I'm quite resilient. It was interesting actually because it almost took me back to that 16 year old me doing basic training.

Do you think you got a bit of respect from the DS given your military background?

I think definitely in terms of what I went through with the injury, because I'm sure they've come close, or they've probably been involved in IEDs, those kind of things where they might have had small injuries, but they haven't had life changing injuries. So I don't think anyone can ever relate unless they've been through it themselves, what it's actually like to go through an injury and come out the other side. So I think I got that respect, in terms of you've come through something we've never been through. But I was in the RAF, I was an engineer, in my eyes they're kind of on a pedestal, they are Gods in a way. I've proved myself in sport, but then I was in their world, in their environment, so I wanted to prove myself in front of them. But don't think they treated me any differently than anyone else, they definitely didn't!

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

What did you make of the celebrity lineup?

I think we had quite a good first lineup. Everyone really surprised me, which is quite a nice experience to have. Very rarely do you get loads of people from different worlds meeting in one arena. So it's quite good to see that. Definitely thought it's quite an able cast in terms of the amount of sports stars and people who were physically fit. So I knew it was going to be competitive. After the first few days I was like, "There's no one dropping out." I thought we'd lose a few on the first day when reality kicked in, but we didn't. They were a determined bunch.

You had to fight Zoe Lyons, what was that like?

I didn't know how I'd feel fighting against a woman. When they called my number out and I knew it was Zoe, I was like, "Oh!" And straightaway my first emotion was like, I kind of wanted to fight one of the big lads. I'd rather that, naturally. But I'd seen Arg fight Perri and they let that fight run and run until they were basically windmilling. I just thought if I don't engage then they're going to drag it on and on and on until someone does engage. I do know that if that was in real combat and there was an enemy that was a female or a child, it's not a nice thing to do, but you kind of have to do it. I did have a laugh with Chris before about putting boxing gloves on, and I joked, "Do you have to put one on my little arm?" He laughed, and was like, "Stop it, get your head in your game." And then his last words were, "kill or be killed, just get it done." So that's what I did.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

My military career was cut short, I wanted to see whether I have what it takes to survive in a world the DS think is normal. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity that showed me that I have the mental strength to go further than I ever thought. And after losing my military career when I did, it was a nice reminder to just be back in that world again, to feel that camaraderie with the others. In a very weird way I enjoyed every minute of it. I'd actually do it again if I could!

AMBER TURNER – RECRUIT NUMBER 10



Age: 29

From: Essex

Occupation: Reality TV Star

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Amber has been a regular cast member on *The Only Way Is Essex* since 2017. She wants to prove to people that she's different to the person the public perceive her to be. Regularly working out, she is also a black belt in karate having followed in her mum's footsteps from a young age. She hates being sweaty, is petrified of spiders and bugs and is a fussy eater. By doing the SAS course, Amber wants to learn about herself and discover what her strengths are.

Why did you want to do the toughest show on TV?

Do you know what it is? I think I've always been into my sports and my fitness growing up. As a child, I did every sport you can imagine. I was a runner, a swimmer, I did karate, and I just always loved anything sport related, and I always had a bit of a buzz for adrenaline. I've seen it on TV and I thought, "I'd love to see if I'm strong enough and tough enough to do that." Because it wasn't the fitness side of things that was going to concern me because I thought, "I am really fit." I wasn't worried about that. It was more just the mental side of things I wanted to see if I could do.

Did you do any preparation for the show?

A little bit. I practiced carrying a heavy backpack. I carried a really heavy backpack, went for a long walk/run. I was doing lots of press-ups because as a woman, to do a proper press-up is very difficult. Men can just do them, can't they? But I feel like us women, we have to sometimes go on our knees. There was no going on your knees for press-ups there. Jesus Christ! If you dare to put your knees down, you get absolutely beasted! The one thing I was practicing a lot of, which thank god we didn't do, where you hang onto the bar. Because, honestly, I could do about 30 seconds. I couldn't hold on at all.

Did you know anybody that had done the show before you could ask for advice?

Yeah. I spoke to Ferne McCann, because she did it before me. She said she loved it. She had the most amazing time, and she was so excited for me that I was doing it. Even since it's been announced, she's messaged me, and she's really excited to watch me on it. So it's nice to speak to other people who have done it. She made me excited to do it because she had the best experience and enjoyed it so much. She just said, "Take every day as it comes, and just give it your all." And she's like, "You'll be fine." She knows I like my fitness, and she's like, "You're going to smash it. You're going to do so well." It was a nice little pep talk before I went in.

What do you think your strengths and weaknesses were going to be?

I'm not scared of heights, I'm not scared to jump off things. I'm scared of spiders, but I'm not scared of snakes. I don't like bugs and creepy-crawlies, but I wasn't scared of anything like that, so I wasn't worried about that. The only thing I was freaking out about is I'm claustrophobic. So the bag on the head, for me, even thinking about it makes me actually feel sick.

What did you make of all the other celebrities who you were doing the show with?

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Oh, I loved it. I feel like every single person was so kind. Everyone was really friendly. Everyone took it really serious as well, which I liked. You just never know with a show being like that when it's got celebrities on. It's not like a civilian one where they want to do it because they want to do it. Obviously, celebrities want to do it as well, but I wasn't sure how serious people would take it. I take things really seriously. If I'm doing something, I just try to take things as serious as I can. So everyone took things very seriously, and everyone was really kind. It felt like we was a weird family. We bonded really quickly.

What do you make of the DS?

I love them all, honestly. Obviously their job is to replicate a real-life selection process. But, towards the end, you could see a little bit of their personality coming out. When we were doing something that required a lot of filming or everyone's got a 20-minute spot to film something, you saw a little bit of their personality coming out. And it just made you feel a little bit more relaxed because you think, "They are just normal people, and they have been through a crazy life really." You've just got to respect what they've done. I feel like it was nice to hear the stories that they were telling us about the things they've been through in the past. It was good.

What's it like when they're screaming at you?

Yeah, they screamed at me a lot. The problem was my face. Apparently, my face says what I'm thinking before I say anything. Whenever I did something wrong, I would go, "Oh," and I'd be annoyed at myself. But they thought I was rolling my eyes at them. And I was like, "Oh, I'm not." Then I'd be like, "Oh." I just thought, "I have to keep my face straight."

Was there any particular one of them that you wanted to impress the most?

No, not really. I didn't have a favourite or anything. I didn't want to impress a specific one. I wanted to impress them all, essentially. Hopefully I did.

What was it like having to fight Montana?

Oh, my god, it was horrible. I could have cried at the end. I hugged her and said sorry, and they shouted at me for saying that. I can't do right for doing wrong! It was really horrible. Honestly, I don't think I can watch that back.

What would you say was the toughest challenge?

Everything was so different and tested you in such a different way. I think the one that I can remember the most was where I had to carry a speedboat with other people, and we just didn't stop. It felt like it went on for about four hours, and we just didn't have a break at all. It was the most physically demanding thing.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

I had the most amazing time, and if they asked me to do it again tomorrow I would, without a doubt. So I think that speaks to volumes about how much of a great time I had. Even though it might not look like it. I did love every minute of it, and I would honestly do it again. If they're doing a second one, I'll happily join!

DANIELLE LLOYD – RECRUIT NUMBER 11



Age: 39

From: Liverpool

Occupation: TV Personality

Ex-WAG, Former Miss GB and model, Danielle is now a mother to five and a 'soccer mum'. By doing the SAS course Danielle wants to show people that she's determined and thinks it is important to show the real her. Having 5 young children, she doesn't have the time to get dressed up and be as glamorous as everyone thinks she always is. After being in some controlling relationships when she was younger, she fears that the DS shouting in her face will bring back all those horrible memories.

Why did you say yes to it?

I love the programme to start off with, I watch every series. I knew it was going to be tough because I'm not the fittest person. And I think that when I went into that room with the SAS staff straight away I was like, "I'm not tough by the way. I'm just letting you know," I said, "But I feel like I am. I've got five kids. I'm definitely mentally a strong person. I have to be". And I've been through a lot in my life that's made me a strong person. So I feel like if it's the mental stuff I can get myself to the end. And they're like, "Okay, let's see then!" But yeah, I did it to prove to myself how strong I actually am, mentally. I knew the physical side was going to be really tough but I wanted to test myself.

Do you know anybody that's done it before to ask for advice?

I knew it was going to be brutal, but I did speak to Jennifer Ellison who was on the show the year before to just get a little bit of advice. And she was just like, "Do what you can. Just don't worry, stay strong and just have, not fun because it wasn't exactly fun, but just try your best". And that's all I did. I feel like Scouse girls are really strong-minded.

What was your biggest fear before you flew out there?

I suppose the staff, I was just a bit nervous about them as well not being able to cope physically because I am quite petite, I'm not very fit, and I wanted to do well so obviously the fitness side of stuff was really quite intimidating for me.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

What would you say your biggest strength was going into the course?

I feel like mentally being strong. Obviously my weakness is my kids. So thinking about them, I really did struggle and missed them, not having that routine of being at home with them it was really, really tough. But then I also feel like I took on a bit of a motherly role in there. I acted like the mother a couple of times. So yeah, it was really tough mentally as well. What I feel like, although it was tough mentally, I was strong enough to come through it.

Who were you mothering?

Arg! He couldn't even get himself ready! I was like, "Surely you know how to put on a belt?!" I think most of the time I was literally "Arg, you are the biggest liability here. Could you just please... You can't even put a belt on!" We got beasted because of him!

Do you cope well being out of your comfort zone?

Usually I don't like being out of my comfort zone. I'm terrified of heights as well. So I think one of the first things we had to do was go really high on this tightrope thing and I was like, "I'm not going to be able to do this. I'm really not". But I feel like I was there, I was in the moment, I didn't want to let my family down, so I was just like, "I'm going to do this. I've come to do it".

What did you think when you saw the rest of the lineup?

It was quite a mix, but it was a really nice group of people. I feel like everyone was so nice, so friendly. I think we were had a bit of anticipation waiting for Matt Hancock to turn up because obviously we'd read all that stuff about him before, but everyone was just so, so nice. We all got on really well. Obviously there were times when you're in there, people were snapping a little bit and stuff, but that's pressure and feeling tiredness and stuff like that. But beforehand, everyone got on really well, surprisingly.

How did you feel about him Matt being there?

I wasn't into politics or anything. I didn't really have any preconceptions about anyone. I try and take people as they come. He was really friendly to me so I just thought take him as he is.

What did you make of the DS?

They were scary but then they were also there to help and motivate you. I didn't ever feel upset because they were being mean or anything. You know what you're there for. And I wanted to do well for them as well. I wanted to prove to them that I was going to be able to get to the end.

What is it like when they're in your face screaming?

I've got this really bad habit of laughing when I'm nervous. I don't know whether they'll show that, but that was my worst fear - of laughing in their face. But not because I was laughing at them, laughing with nerves. But they were scary. It was scary at times and it is hard. I'm not used to being shouted at. I'm used to shouting at my kids, I do things the other way around!

Was there a DS that you wanted to impress the most?

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Not really. Obviously seeing Billy on the telly before, I knew he was hardcore. He wouldn't take any sh*t off anyone. He used to laugh at my eyelashes all the time. He was like, "What the f*ck are they?" And I used to be thinking, "I don't know, I don't even know what to say". I think the most terrifying point was when they took the hood off the first day, when we got there, they pushed us into the water and they were literally in my face. I was thinking, "oh my God, I could scream, I'm so scared. What is going to happen? That was terrifying". There was one moment where Rudy literally, at one point, picked me up and threw me through the air and I just landed in the water and I was like, "What the hell's just happened?" They were hardcore!

Given your fear of heights, how did you feel about the traverse on day one?

I was literally shaking. My legs were shaking, I just felt sick. I felt like I was on the brink of passing out, but then I just wanted to do well. I just thought, "Get through it, get through it. You can do it, you can do it, you can do it". I was just thinking about my family at home and just wanted to do well for them.

How tough were the beatings?

They were really tough. Some of them were like one o'clock in the morning as well. They'd randomly wake us up and give us a beating and I was just like, "I'm so not prepared for this. Physically not prepared. But it's one o'clock in the morning!"

Did you enjoy your time in camp with the others?

Yeah, when we get time off, we used to play little games, which was fun. The morale was really good in there. Actually I had made some amazing friends as well, which was great. I'd say I bonded with Montana the most. She surprised me how strong she was. And Amber, she was physically strong. I made some really good bonds in there, so I've got friends for life.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

Life changing, it was just life changing. It's made me positive and ready to take on the world.

Any advice to anybody thinking about doing the next series?

Do it. It'll change your life and it'll make you feel good about yourself. Not only physically, but definitely mentally as well.

GARETH THOMAS – RECRUIT NUMBER 12



Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Age: 48

From: Wales

Occupation: Ex-Welsh Rugby International

Gareth is well known for representing Wales in Rugby. In 2009 he came out as gay and his public confirmation of his sexuality made him the first openly gay professional rugby player. In September 2019, he announced that he was HIV positive with an undetectable status. He wants to kill the stigma around HIV and show to people that by doing SAS he can do physical and mental challenges.

Why did you say yes to this show?

Because I wanted to say no, is the answer to it. I've found in life, most things worth doing are most things that at the end of it have a sense of completion, a sense of success and tasks that beforehand, you are very wary of doing. You have a huge fear of doing it, because you feel it doesn't fit who you are, or you feel that it's way outside of your comfort zone. So I really did it because I really didn't want to do it. I know it sounds absolutely bizarre, but I feel that's the point of where I am at in my life is that the easy road, the easy path, it's not boring, it's comfortable. And it's not like every day I face massive challenges, but I believe it's something that helps evolve me.

Did you feel like you had anything to prove?

No, absolutely not. I feel I had something to represent, because I think people have personal reasons to do it, the bigger picture was the purpose of understanding that I represent the community of people, whether it'd be with my HIV status, or whether it would be with my sexuality that have maybe stereotypically assumed not to go down this kind of pathway. It's deemed to be very much a more alpha, macho environment. So the pressure came from me to want to show that whatever characteristic you are, you are capable of attempting, you are capable of achieving something that maybe society deems is not within the realms of achievement for you.

Did you do anything in terms of preparation to go on the course?

I didn't really change, because, bizarrely, I wanted it to be a real challenge. I watched a few of the shows prior to it. I didn't really want to know what I was going into over there, because then it would've taken the fear factor away. So I didn't really want to know that much about what I was doing. I've always kept myself fit. But what I learned about doing it is that - and this is no disrespect to the show, because the show is the best thing I've ever done in my entire life, by the way - but you can go 80% depending on what you want to get out of it. You go 60% depending on what you want to get out of it, or you can literally go 100% every single time, and really, really push yourself. I think it's difficult to train for that, especially when you don't know what's coming. I wanted to do everything to the maximum of my capabilities, whenever I was asked.

Did you ask anyone who's done the show before for advice?

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

Yeah, so Jake Quickenden, he's a good friend of mine. I told him I was doing it, and he told me his experiences of it. But to be honest, if he said it was the worst thing he did, or if he said it was the best thing, I wouldn't have really been swayed either way, because I had made the decision to go. So I did ask, but purely because I wanted to know what other people have got out of it. And if it was one of these reality shows where you go in, everybody says the right thing and everybody does the right thing, and everybody loves each other. And then you come out there, and you all say you're going to be friends for the rest of your life and after a month, you don't speak to anybody ever again. I wondered if it was going to be one of those shows that is maybe manufactured to create good television, which there's a place for it. I totally get it. But from the conversation I had with Jake, the reality of it is 100%. The reality is very, very real.

Flying out there, what was your biggest fear?

I have so many phobias, so many fears, I was afraid of a lot of things. I knew there'd be things involving heights, which I hate. I knew there'd be things in tight spaces, I'm very claustrophobic. I knew we wouldn't be sleeping in an inside bed, with a tog 20 duck down quilt to wrap up in. So very much, I felt there was going to be a lot of things that are going to be thrown on me that are going to make me very uncomfortable.

What do you think your strengths and weaknesses were going to be?

One of my strengths, I felt, would be that I will naturally allow myself to fall into a role within the group. I think what I learned from rugby is that people sometimes force themselves to be leader. I felt one of my strengths is that I would naturally allow myself to fall in whatever anybody else felt my position was worthy of. I felt I had a real strength in my physical ability or my mental attribute to being sure that I will not only make myself and push myself 100% on every task I have, but if I have the opportunity, I will make sure that everybody else or anybody else who is struggling whilst giving a hundred percent is still able to achieve what I potentially was.

What about your weaknesses?

I was worried that there would be people that I would clash with, or people that I would feel were selfish because I have a real dislike for selfishness, but I get it. It's a trait to people, and people are successful sometimes when they're selfish. It's not always a bad thing. And also, I do really like to please people all the time, even though it's impossible. I really like to look after somebody else before I look after myself. I take great joy in that. And what I didn't want was I didn't want that to then affect my experience in participating myself, because I taking too much time to look after everybody else. You end up forgetting about yourself.

What did you think when you saw the rest of the celebrity lineup?

I loved everybody's personal reason for doing it. But also, I loved everybody, male and female, I liked the balls they had to be able to do it. I love the fact that someone like Melinda Messenger, who literally was as big as our rucksacks, agreed to do it. I don't care what people say. I love the fact that Matt Hancock did it and decided to say, "Do you know

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

what? Yeah, I know exactly what people think of me, but I want to do it, and I want to show people maybe a different side of me." I just love the fact that everybody had this story, whether it be from past experiences or vulnerabilities that they just said, "You know what? I want to do this because I know I'm going to get something out of this."

What do you make of the DS?

I got to a point where it's like, "I know you're screaming at me, and I can hear exactly what you're said. And I know what you're telling me to do. So yeah, do you know what? I'll do it." I probably still would stick my hand in a fire if one of them told me to. Not because they shouted at me to do it, because I believe them that they're telling me to do it, because there's a good purpose for whatever reason it may be. They were only asking me to do something because it was right for me to do.

Were they trying to push your buttons and get a rise out of you?

From the off, even though they were never going to push my buttons or get under my skin, I knew who they were. I knew they were above me. And it's like a coach. A coach in rugby wants to get the best out of you, he just screams in your face. Sometimes you don't hear what he's saying, but the fact he's just screaming in your face, you listen and you just do whatever it needs to be done. And I know underneath all that noise was a message. And from minute one, I knew that whatever they were screaming at me, whatever they were shouting at me in whatever manner, whether it be aggressive, whether it be passive-aggressive, whatever it may be, I just do, because they are above me. So they have the authority, they have the right, because I really bought into it. I really bought into the whole process. I always knew it was a reality show, but I bought into the process of "I'm training to be in the SAS. And somebody who's already done this, somebody who is higher than me, somebody who has beaten or I'm trying to beat is telling me to do something. So you know what? They're better than me. They're higher-ranking than me. I do exactly what they say."

You had to fight Siva, how did you find that?

So that was one of the moments I felt where firstly the buildup to it, because we were watching our friends fight each other, and that's really, really uncomfortable, really uncomfortable. Especially when it was Zoe against Jon. It was not nice. But what it became is the minute I put the gloves on and the helmet on and the gum shield in, and the DS was there, then you've got to go into that. "Okay, I've got to do it because you're telling me I have to do it. I don't want to do it, but you're telling me I have to do it." I tell you what, we had a good old fight. It was a good old-fashioned fight that I felt was never going to bloody end. I was shattered. And bizarrely, then, at the end of it me and Siva had this kind of connection for the length of time we were both still there. We fought each other, and we respected each other even more after the fight, because we both knew we had to do what we've been told to do. Neither of us wanted to do it, but out of respect for each other, we both gave a hundred percent. And he gave me, people would think, "Gareth Thomas, ex-rugby player, Siva band member." Let me tell you now. He gave me just as good as I gave him, without a shadow of doubt.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

How would you sum up the whole experience?

There's not many experiences that allow you the opportunity to look inside yourself and see what you're truly made of. I just knew I had to say yes to this so I could work out who I really am, and it totally lived up to my expectations.

ZOE LYONS – RECRUIT NUMBER 13



Age 51

From: Wales

Occupation: Comedian

Best known as a Stand-up Comedian, Game Shows Host and a regular Panellist on TV shows. One of the older recruits at 51, Zoe, an adrenaline junkie is fitter than she was at 30 and wants to discover what she is capable of physically and mentally. The idea of taking on the SAS course terrified her and she wanted to discover what she had within herself. Having alopecia on and off since the age of 11, losing her hair and her identity has made Zoe feel very vulnerable.

What made you sign up to the toughest show on telly?

Well, I'd watched it, and I wanted to see whether I could do it or not. I think it was just as basic as that, I really wanted to see whether I could do it or not. I'm in my fifties now, but I'm probably fitter than I've ever been and I thought, "I wonder if I've got what it takes just to keep going?" It was that just to test myself. I know it sounds really cliché, but it was just that, I've watched it and thought that it looks absolutely horrific and brutal and most people would go, "I'll leave it at that". My brain went, "I wonder if you can do that?"

Did you know anybody that's done it that you call for advice?

I didn't know anybody personally. I had friends of friends who've done it and word on the street was, "it was horrific, that was awful". Only a few people gave any sort of real detail just, "Oh, that's the worst thing I've ever done." You're like, "Oh, okay, that sounds interesting." I'm still going to give it a go. Because there's a bit in my brain that goes, "Well, how bad is bad? How bad is bad?" I've done gigs for three people, that's bad. I've done gigs in pubs where they haven't even turned off the fruit machine and the last thing that the owner has said before you get on stage is, "don't mention the murder". So how bad is bad? When somebody goes, "Smell, that's disgusting." You're like, "Oh, all right."

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

What was your biggest fear or concern about taking on the course?

I suppose everybody, if they're honest, one of the fears that pops up, you don't want to be the first out. That's the thing, because you've paid for airport parking! It's always that thing of, "oh God, I hope I don't make a prat of myself in the first 10 minutes". I'm very uncoordinated and cack-handed, despite enjoying my exercise, I am a danger to anybody around me. So I thought, God, I hope I don't just fall flat on my face in the first 30 seconds and have to leave. I did fall over and hurt myself within the first 30 seconds! I ripped my knee open! I looked down, my trouser was all split. I just didn't mention it and taped it up with some sellotape. So that was a big fear and then my thing has always been heights, because of my bad coordination I just can't function around heights. And I knew there'd be a lot of heights involved, so I was interested to see if I could get to that point of complete and utter terror and push through it.

What do you think your strength would be on the course?

I suppose mentally, it's not that I don't take things too seriously, but you have to have a lightness of touch with things. I volunteered to go in there, so mentally I cope with things through humour, obviously, that's what I've done my whole life, I've made a career out of that. So I knew I had that in my back pocket as well. I suppose the other thing I was worried about as well, because I had terrible alopecia at the time. My hair's grown back, so I've got a full head now. I hadn't exposed myself in that way on television, so I continued to work, but I'd worn wigs and I'd worn hats, and I knew in that environment it just wasn't going to be possible, I had to square that in my head before I went, I was like, this is going to happen, you're going to look odd, because my hair looked odd, I had sort of strangly bits. Are you all right with that? And I thought, well, yeah, if I can do this, then I can do anything. With all due respect, and there are some beautiful looking people on this series, but none of us were looking our best. And I thought, well, if you're going to do it anywhere, do it in an environment like that.

How did you feel when you got there and saw the rest of the lineup?

Well, you do find yourself looking along the line of people and seeing Perri going, "oh my God, she's incredible". The first time I had to run behind Perri, I mean, I look like Forest Gump when I run, the limbs are everywhere, they're all over the place. We were made to sprint down this road and Perri was in front of me and she just took off, this beautiful human being, just striding down. I was like, "oh my God, that's amazing, look how she runs". Then I have to go looking like a pug with asthma after her. So you do gauge everybody going, oh my god, they look so fit. Gareth Gates is built like a brick sh*t house. Then you've got units like Gareth Thomas and Jermaine Pennant. Massive, massive blokes.

What did you make of the DS?

I love those boys, honestly, they are incredible. I have total respect for them, complete and utter total respect for them. They're doing this show now, but their past life, the things that they have done and had to do for king and country, I suppose now, just incredible and I learned so much from them.

As a comic, were you worried about cracking jokes and getting punished?

They don't want that. Actually, do you know what? The first few days were so intimidating and terrifying, that the clown was very much put away for a while, put your clown shoes

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

over there and don't annoy these guys. It is so immersive, it is so real and there's a man that far from your nose, staring at you in the eye with these beautiful blue eyes. I mean, I've got to say the best eyes I've ever seen, but everything is so alert and so terrifying. The clown shoes were truly put away for the first few days.

You must be used to hecklers, but how was it having them screaming at you?

It's a different level, it's very intimidating. It's really, really intimidating and I suppose a bit of me was thinking, "they take this seriously, so I have to take this seriously". I was just very aware of being very respectful to them and what they do. So there was a time and the place for the humour to come out. I think when you're being screamed at in the face by them, let's say yes, that wasn't the time!

How did it feel tackling the trainasium?

Awful, that was my worst day. I hated that because it's not that I'm a scaredy-cat, I'm not, I just can't cope with the heights. I just cannot cope. I've never been frozen with fear before and I genuinely was frozen with fear, I couldn't let go. I couldn't let go of the thing I was holding onto and that is when I went, well, that's why you're here, because this is what you wanted to see if you could do. So there was a bit in my head going, well, now we're doing it. So you're in Vietnam, dangling above a patch of ground with two scaffold poles, this is why you wanted to do it, you idiot. At the very least, let go, let go and fall, at the very very least. I hated it, absolutely hated that. I knew that wasn't going to be my finest moment.

They also made you fight Jon, how was that?

That was horrible. I knew we'd have to do that at some point and I knew that wasn't going to be my strong point. I don't think I've ever been in a fight in my life. I thought if I can just get one swing in, I'll be happy, but I found that really challenging because it is violence and it's coming your way and emotionally, I found that quite tough. I'm competitive, but I'm also realistic as to my capabilities. And when I looked in Jon's eyes and I could see he was competitive, but also very assured of his capabilities, I knew I was going to get a pasting and it hurt. It really hurt. I think I broke a rib. I was yellow down this side for about a month.

What was it like being gassed?

I didn't have a problem with that! I actually quite enjoyed that. I know that sounds weird, but that was my favourite bit. Things like that don't faze me, because I go scuba diving. I've been in situations where breath has been short and I've learned not to panic. So that was why I was like, I can do this. So it honestly didn't bother me. I thought I've got enough breath, I won't die, I've just got to keep calm. My eyes sting a bit, but I remember clubs in the nineties, my eyes stung a bit then and I knew I'd be able to cope with that one. It honestly didn't faze me. If anything, it lulled me into a false sense of security thinking it was all going to be easy.

How bad were the beatings?

There was one in particular that we did where Billy made us crawl on our stomachs with our backpacks on, and I genuinely thought I was going to expire. I thought if it goes on for another second, I'm going to die. I think a lot of us were right on the edge of just going, do you know what, I'd rather do Antiques Roadshow. It was so hard, so hard. I was seconds away from going, I can't do this anymore. Then you get to that point, and I find this when

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

I'm doing my long runs, you go second to second. Lots of people when they're taking on challenges go day to day, whatever that is you're trying to do. So you're trying to lose weight, you're trying to drink less, you go day to day. But when things get really, really hard, you go second to second. You break it down to hours to hours and it's minute to minute. And then in a situation like that where you are gasping for breath and you are utterly exhausted, you just have to go second to second. You just go one more second, that's the only way I know to get myself through.

How would you sum up the experience?

It is completely unforgettable and it's like nothing else you can ever do. There's a bit of me that's thinks I'm incredible fortunate that I got to participate in the show because it does test you, and there's quite a bit of fun to be had if you don't mind losing a few toenails! But how lucky am I to have been able to take part in something like that and have a good long look at myself as a human being? I'm very fortunate and very grateful.

SIVA KANESWARAN – RECRUIT NUMBER 14



Age:34

From: Ireland

Profession: Singer

In 2009, after one audition Siva was selected to be in The Wanted boyband. His bandmate Tom Parker tragically passed away in March 2022 following his ongoing battle with incurable and aggressive brain cancer. Since his passing, Siva knows it will take a long time for him to get back to the new normal and he's unsure what that normal is. As a fitness fanatic, Siva attends the gym at least 6 days a week. He thinks he is physically fit enough to take on the SAS course.

Why did you say yes to one of the most brutal shows on telly?

I wanted to challenge myself. The main reason was I saw the bravery that Tom had and what he showed in the band, and he really showed everyone what type of man he was and what he was made of. He asked me the question and gave me the kind of inspiration to say, "what type of man am I? What type of person am I?" So that was one of the main reasons why I joined **Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins**. I wanted to challenge myself and discover a new part of myself and try and be more brave.

Did you feel like you had anything to prove to yourself or to people watching?

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

As an artist in a band who were away for many years, a lot of people didn't know me. So coming back I wanted to show up for my friends, for my family and just for the UK. I'd come back and I felt like it was about that time to kind of get stuck in and show people what I was made of.

How much preparation did you do before flying out there?

Yeah, I trained a lot. As soon as I knew I was doing it, I basically trained every weekday and sometimes weekends. I really pushed myself. Mainly I knew generally through other people who had done it that it was more a mental thing. So I'd set up a few affirmations to go over in my head if I was struggling. I would lean on those if I really felt like my body was failing, I would kind of go into a mental state and push through because it was all mental, honestly.

Did you ask anybody for advice?

I did ask. I can't say who, but I asked through the grapevine of certain people who have done it, certain folks, certain managers and stuff and generally people said not to do it! One person said, "It was really tough. You have to do this, you have to do that." And a lot of the feedback was only you know if you're ready to do it. And I knew I was ready to do it.

What would you say your biggest fear was going into the course?

I didn't want to leave the first day. I thought, "Oh my God, if I leave here the first day, what was the point of all this?" I had an old knee injury and stuff that I was like, "Oh man, please don't let this get in the way of me trying to go do these challenges and stuff." I really wanted to go in there and show up for myself, really show up and show everyone what I was made of. And that was my goal.

Did you think you might have a weakness on the course?

I think in general sometimes I'm quite a people pleaser. I have that growing up in a big family and sometimes I fall into that and that can be a big distraction. So being around a lot of people in the show and navigating that was quite difficult because obviously you don't want to offend anyone. So everyone's highly stressed, and sometimes I can be quite blunt. And in that situation that was quite difficult to navigate because you're being battered every day and everyone's in pain every day. And so you have to really be careful with that. That was an obstacle on its own, dealing with people in that environment.

Do you like being pushed out of your comfort zone?

Yeah, I like challenges. I like trying something new, more so now than ever, especially over the past two years and it's been quite a mad two years. I've always loved adventure. I love getting on my feet and experience something new. I'm kind of a kid at heart in that sense. So I loved every minute of it.

What did you think when you saw who you'd be up against on the course?

Generally you get the thoughts at the beginning, "Can I beat that one in a race?" Or when I saw Teddy for the first time, I was like, "Oh, Teddy's quite tall. He's a big guy. Oh God, please don't put me against him." But you realise that the courses and the challenges are designed to pick weaknesses in everyone. Everyone has their weaknesses and you could be the biggest guy, but terrified of heights, you could be the fastest runner but the slowest swimmer. And I realised that day one that it wasn't going to go how we expected it to go for

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

sure. I realised the girls are way stronger than I'd expected. I thought, "Okay, basically me against the boys really, because the strongest wins." No, the girls are stronger. I would say they are stronger than us in a lot of ways mentally. And I remember Danielle, she was saying, "I've had five kids, I can do this." And I was like, "oh yeah, girls can experience much more pain than boys!" I was so impressed by a lot of the girls.

Did having so many sport stars in the line-up make it competitive?

I mean, you're against athletes, so of course you're going to have to step it up. And I'm an artist, these hands are soft! So getting into that was some experience, but you get inspired, you see how they prepare, you see what you do with their routines, you learn quickly how to survive the journey. And like I said, these obstacle courses are made to pick at you and mentally when you watch it, you'll see. You'll be surprised who struggles and who thrives.

What did you think about Matt Hancock being there?

He was very kind and very sweet and he checked on people, he looked after people and then obviously there was a whole other side him where he was competitive and smart. But I don't have a bad word to say about him in the show.

What did you make of the DS?

There's mixed feelings to be honest. I was trying to be kind and just be civil towards them, even when they were being mean towards me and they took advantage of that. They saw my weaknesses there too. They were like "Mr Nice Guy" and all this, and they get in my head and twist it around and say things to make it seem like I was trying to take advantage of them.

How did it feel being screamed at?

Yeah, there's one thing when someone shouts at you and it's like I can deal with someone shouting at me and screaming at me, whatever, that's cool. But because they start to know you, they shout certain things that are going to trigger you while you're in your lowest state, lifting a box on your shoulder and they'll say, "Oh, we knew you were going to quit. We knew you were going to quit," certain things like that. And like literally you've got a big 20kg box on your shoulder and you're like, "Oh my god, they really know what to say." And they were very talented at that.

They make you fight each other, how was that?

Oh my God, they put me against Gareth Thomas! He's massive. I was like, "Oh my God. Okay, okay, okay, just go for it. Go for it." It was a bit of shock that I was in that situation against Gareth. Obviously I've had to sleep in the same room as that guy and I've seen him with his top off and he's built like a tank! The DS give you a pep talk before you go in. I'm like, "I'm going to go in, I'm going to beat him." And then two punches in, Gareth taught me a lesson!

You have to write letters home, what was that like?

Yeah, I didn't expect that to be in the show. Obviously bravery comes in all forms and obviously being brave about your emotions was the message of that and speaking the truth. And that was another challenge for me. But I made the decision to go in there and lay it all out and let it burn. I felt like that was more of a release for me, to be honest, because I felt

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

like I was holding a lot in over the past year. And it was nice just to get it all out and show the guys in the room and everyone watching who I am. And I hope that shows for sure.

How would you sum up the whole experience?

If you dig being tortured for a few days and being dragged out your comfort zone then this is the show for you! In a weird way, it was very fulfilling in the sense that you face your fears and you come out of it a new person, a new improved person. People have been asking me about it because they have been interested doing it themselves. I'm like, no, this is hard. Listen, it's a very personal experience. So if you want to do it, you have to do it for your reasons and for no one else's reasons. And do not let fear get in the way of you doing it. If you're too afraid to do it, then you're not supposed to be doing it. That gets in the way big time, day one that gets in the way.

MELINDA MESSENGER – RECRUIT NUMBER 15



Age:51

From: Swindon

Profession: TV Presenter

Melinda is 51, 5ft 1, she doesn't work out, doesn't go to the gym, walks her dog and goes on the occasional bike ride. "Why am I putting myself through this?!" By doing this course, she wants to find out about herself because she might find something in her that she didn't know before. Melinda has many fears including heights, water and fire. Everything on the SAS course!

This is the toughest TV show on the telly, why did you sign up?

I think for that reason. I love a challenge. I love to do or put myself in a situation where I have zero experience, where something's completely new, I knew I was going to be totally out of my comfort zone. I probably wouldn't be able to do it, but just for me, it's like meeting the challenge. So in saying yes and putting myself up for it, in my head it's like, "It's fine if I can't do it, if I fail, if I humiliate myself, all of those things, I've done that a thousand times anyway", but I just want to know what does it feel like and what could I do and what might be possible. But obviously I had real reservations. I loved the show. I've been a massive fan of the show, but obviously I am 52. I hadn't exercised, well since before the pandemic, so 2019. And I've been working as a therapist, doing little bits of TV. And so I knew it was going to really throw me out of all of my comfort zones. I was in the middle of

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

writing my MA dissertation for the final year of my therapist training, which has taken 10 years. And this was coming right at the end. So for me, there was something about it as well that because it was so tough, it was because it was going to be such a massive challenge, I just wanted to see what would happen.

Are you somebody that flourishes when you're out of your comfort zone?

It's a real test, but that's the bit I enjoy. I like being tested. And it's more I suppose because of the work that I do and what I've studied for the last 10 years is psychotherapy. It's all about understanding. First of all, you have to understand yourself before you can really understand another. So I've put myself in so many situations that have been incredibly challenging, and you learn a lot. You learn a lot about what is going on inside of you and how you are made up. So for me, it was a little bit of an extension of that. It was an extension of saying, "Well, I know I can't do any of this. I know this is going to be phenomenally hard, but what will that feel like for me? How will I cope in that situation?"

Flying out there, what would you say was your biggest fear about taking on the course?

The biggest fear? I suppose the unknown. It is also unknown. I didn't want a really bad injury that then might affect the rest of my life, so that was quite a fear, well, a concern.

Otherwise, yeah, really all of it, I guess. Not knowing what was going to happen, who we were going to be with, what we were going to have to do, not knowing where we were going, it was all pretty terrifying, I'm not going to lie!

Going into the course, what would you say your biggest strength was?

Probably a willingness to have a go.

What about your weakness?

Physical strength, fitness levels, my height and size. Because the bergens we have to carry, they're half my body weight and half my height and I had to carry that on my back and run in a Vietnamese jungle! So that was insanely hard for me. I actually don't even know how I did it. I couldn't even stand up with it. Gareth Thomas was running next to me at one point and he was carrying his bag like a little shoulder bag.

How did you find when you got there and met all the other celebs that you would be with?

Well, what was great about it is I didn't know a lot of the people there. So that's nice in a way because then I had no prejudgments. Because I don't really watch telly. I didn't necessarily know what they've done or anything, so I felt like I was meeting people for the first time. I didn't have the sort of expectations or prejudgments. And then of course, we were all bonded by the fear of what we were about to do. So I actually loved being with them. I loved that. I love being part of a team. We felt like a little kind of family making our way through this crazy thing we're all about to do. I really liked the fact that there were all

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

different ages and people from different backgrounds, everybody brought something different to it.

What did you make of Matt Hancock being there?

Matt was such a surprise for me, probably the biggest surprise, A, that he was there because it was before the *I'm A Celeb* jungle, so that was a huge surprise, but also because he I did know and did have preconceptions about. And actually I got to know him, and I thought, "All right, just suspend all of that because we're out here together. We're all about to embark on something, just meet him as he is." And I really warmed to Matt actually. I spent some time getting to know him and understanding him. And whilst we might have very different opinions, we're probably opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of our viewpoints on certain things, but I can appreciate that someone else thinks entirely differently to me and respect them and like them. And knowing him outside of the press and outside of how he's portrayed, I saw a very different person.

What did you make of them DS?

Oh my goodness. I was terrified to begin with! Foxy's just got a really great sense of humour and his warmth really shines through. But I knew what I was letting myself in for. I knew they were going to be screaming and shouting at us. I knew that was the deal, and I knew that that was their job, so I don't actually take that stuff personally. What I was really worried about is I know that one of my sort of defence mechanisms if I'm really frightened or under pressure or under big stress or if somebody's being outrageously aggressive in some way, then I laugh, which is not really very good. And so I think I was just making this effort to keep myself as straight-faced I possibly could, which I dread to think what that's going to look like because it'll look so unnatural because I would naturally be smiling or giggling. But I knew that I would get absolutely punished if I did that, so I was like, "Whatever happens, do not laugh, do not smile."

Was there one particular DS that you wanted to impress the most?

I didn't want to impress any of them, actually. What I wanted to do was stay under the radar as much as possible. I didn't want them to notice me at all. That was the priority. I wanted to fade into the background. I'll just do what I can do to get through this.

You have to fight Michelle Heaton, what was that like?

The fight itself was absolutely fine. I didn't even think about that and I didn't feel anything about it. It was just quite primal. It's like, "This is what I've got to do. I'll go and do it." So that didn't bother me in the slightest. What did bother me was watching Zoe having to fight Jon. Because he was so strong and so much bigger than her. I got really worried about that and I wanted them to stop it, but they didn't. I guess they knew what they were doing, but that bothered me a lot, watching someone else fight. But me doing it, I was fine, just didn't think about it. I think I do quite well with that stuff anyway. I grew up with two brothers, so I got probably more toughened up in that way. But I can't bear seeing someone else getting hit. That's the thing I don't like.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

It was an intense experience but did you have a laugh in camp as well?

We did. We had a lot of laughs in there. I think when we sort of catch sight of each other as we're in the flooded toilets squatting down. There was a whole load of crabs or something that had come out of the swamp that just sort of went past our feet, and we were just looking at each other like, "What are we doing?" Michelle and I just looked at each other and laughed. I'm like, "Oh my god, this is insane." There was just lots of funny little bizarre, surreal moments like that in there.

How would you just sum up the whole experience?

I would say it was incredible, the most intensely physically challenging thing I've done. I would say it was surreal, but I'd also say it was way harder, because I've watched all the shows as well because I love it, but it's way harder than it looks on TV. I think because you've got battling fear all the time of like, "Oh my god, what is going to happen?" But it was also brilliant and exciting and fun, dare I say it - yeah, I loved it. I'd highly recommend anyone to do it. But you have to be a little bit mad I think!

KIRSTY-LEIGH PORTER – RECRUIT NUMBER 16



Age:34

From: Manchester

Profession: Actress

Hollyoaks actor Kirsty wanted to have the chance to push herself out of her comfort zone and not know what's going to happen next. She was aware that struggling to hide her emotions would be challenging in front of the DS. A big fear of Kirsty's is disappointing people close to her – therefore she wanted to go into the experience giving this her all. Although she is not afraid of heights she does admit to struggling in the heat.

Why did you want to take on this course?

The reason for me signing on to the course was to test who I am as a person I feel like as you get older, you get a bit lost as to who you are, who I used to be, who I am as a mother, as a partner, as my character Leela, you kind of get lost amongst it all so I wanted to break

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

contact with every day life strip back mentally and physically and face me and see what my limits and boundaries are.

Did you feel like you had anything to prove?

I didn't feel like I had anything to prove I just wanted to see how strong I was what my capabilities were what my limits were and maybe prove that to myself.

Do you know anyone who has done the show before you could ask for advice (and what did they say)?

I knew Nikki Sanderson had done the course before and she did incredibly well, she was absolutely amazing. I would have asked her for advice but we were sworn to secrecy when we first signed on so I didn't discuss it with anyone. Looking back I could have done with some tips!

Did you do any preparation beforehand?

It was so difficult to find the time to actually prepare the course, working long days on set at Hollyoaks to then being a mum. Of course we weren't told of the location either at the time of the pairing so to prep for jungle terrain was quite hard. I did do some weight training, some running but looking back it was nowhere near enough. I wish I would have had the time to do a lot more it would have probably given me a bit more strength but it was just so difficult.

Flying out to Vietnam, what were you most afraid of?

Flying out to Vietnam I was most afraid of being so far away from my daughter Nala. I'd never even been away from her for one night at this point so to be on the other side of the world was quite daunting. I've never really left her side and ended up on the other side of the world for just over three weeks. That was actually the most frightening thing because I knew it wasn't just round the corner – I couldn't just get the bus back or a taxi home. That was really quite daunting and we actually had a christening on the Sunday so I spent the whole day with her before flying early in the morning. I just felt a bit sad leaving and then going to Vietnam was exciting and overwhelming.

What do you think your strength and weaknesses were going to be on the course?

I knew my weakness would be food. I can get quite hungry! So I was a bit worried about that. Also sleep it sounds silly because as a mum I have suffered with sleep deprivation before so I'm quite used to having a quick power nap here and there to keep me going but obviously there's absolutely no time for that. I knew that was going to go against me and would make me quite weak. Also I'm no good with spiders and creepy crawlies. Just being away from home again, that is a huge weakness for me being a home bird. Strengths... I'm quite good at being dictated, if someone's going to shout the rules that didn't worry me so I thought I'd be quite strong with that.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

How would you rate your mental strength?

When I was younger I was quite headstrong, quite positive and determined. But in recent years my mental strength did suffer. I think my brain can be in a permanent stress response - I'm always worrying about anything and everything, anything can trigger that worry and I end up suffering with panic attacks or anxiety. I think that's just a way my mental health responds but it's getting better every day is a journey and you do feel stronger every day.

What did you think when you saw the rest of the celebrity line-up?

When I saw the rest of the celeb line-up, I thought ooh, this will be interesting...

Tell us about the DS, what did you think about them?

The DS were absolutely brutal, there's no other way about it those guys are unbelievable at their craft.

How does it feel being screamed at by them?

To be honest I get really bad giggles in serious situations so I was more fearful of that happening whilst being shouted at than the actual shouting itself. It did happen, I actually got the giggles, I don't know whether its going to be shown or not though but I did!

How tough are the beatings?

I remember getting our first beating off the DS. We were all lined-up after swimming in the swamps in terrain, it was pouring down with rain and almost impossible to see. We were told to keep still and I remember the rain was just pouring down our eyes. I remember Arg bless him he kept trying to wipe the rain and the hair out of his eyes and we were screamed at because of it and we all got our first beating we all got punished and it was absolutely brutal.

Did you enjoy any of the challenges?

I'm not going to lie I didn't enjoy any of the challenges. None of it I would call enjoyable although to be fair I would have loved to have done the tightrope challenge that would have been right up my street but unfortunately I didn't get that far.

How tough was the jungle terrain?

The jungle terrain was tough, it was really tough. Making our way through on our stomachs not knowing what was beneath us, not even knowing when the ground beneath us was actually going to turn into a swamp. We would literally drown, our heads would go under and then we would be back up again it was just madness. There were broken trees and trunks and god knows what kind of species were under there. We were just sliding on our fronts trying to get through. The trunks were literally snapped in half they were so sharp they could have impaled us at any moment. My shins still carry the scars.

Press Pack: Strictly embargoed until (please note specific timings):

For online outlets only: Monday 25 September, 20:00

For print outlets and all other press: Tuesday 26 September, from 00.01 onwards

It was a tough experience but did you have a laugh in camp, any memories that stick out?

When we got to camp I remember looking at the food and thinking oh no what is that. It was tofu, I had never had tofu before, and never had it since and never will again. That in itself I thought that was one of the challenges eating that it was just awful so kind of glad I didn't have to eat that every day.

Did the experience change you in any way?

With my experience on the course it wasn't long but it did make me realise I have to spend a lot more time working on me and being present in the moment learning to let go. Taking baby steps and not giant leaps to a jungle!

How would you sum up your experience on the show?

To sum up my experience on the show I would say surreal, absolutely surreal, like was that just one big dream... or nightmare.

- Ends -