



My Pet is my rock...

THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW

John Thomson Actor

I'M helping John Thomson weigh up his pet options. His daughters are pleading for a dog, but he's worried the cat won't be keen.

I ask if he has suggested a stick insect.

"Not yet," he admits. "But hey, how about a pet rock? Remember those? They were those stones with googly eyes on them."

Hmm, couldn't that? I have a few of them."

Now, in case you think we've completely lost the plot here, John's daughters' concern is perfectly legitimate. Cold Feet' John is one of the hosts tonight of a Channel 5 telethon, Celebrity Help The Animals At Christmas, raising funds for five animal charities, and so the responsibility of pet ownership is actually something he's keen to highlight right now.

"A pet is a big commitment," he points out, "but people don't always look at the big picture."

"A lot of pets rescued by charities haven't necessarily been mistreated, just their owners can't cope."

Tonight's show (other hosts include Anton du Beke, Susan Calman, Gethin Jones, Michaela Strachan and Gaby Roslin) is the last major job for John in what's been

another bumper-busy year, much of it devoted to the filming of Cold Feet series eight.

Coming to ITV next month, it's the third helping of the Manchester-based drama since its debut in 2016.

"Series six was fantastic," he says, with evident pride. "Seven was a bit like 'that difficult second album', a bit of a slow-burn. But this one is fantastic, very strong. I can't say much, but two really major things have changed."

John's character Pete Gifford, whose

depression storyline in series seven won both critical praise and awards ("That was very kind, I didn't anticipate any of that").

It just wasn't quite the job he'd imagined.

He's also arguably the most recognizable of the five old pals around which the show revolves.

"I think that's because he's kind of hapless and fallible," John says with a smile. "People identify with fallibility."

Not that the actor and his character have much in common. For starters, John has been off the booze for years. "I look after myself now," he says. "I don't drink any more, I don't smoke any more, I've got a personal trainer."

"I look all right, considering what I've given up, if you know what I mean. And it's paid dividends. I'm 55 next year but in my head I'm 25. When I look at some people my age who I've known for a while and think,

JOHN'S FAVOURITES

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| TV SHOW: The Six Million Dollar Man |
| FILM: The Dead Zone |
| DRAMA: Lovejoy |
| SINGER: Nat King Cole |
| CHRISTMAS SONG: All I Want For Christmas Is You, by Mariah Carey |
| BOOK: The Secret, by Rhonda Byrne |
| MUSIC: James Bond theme |
| ACTOR: Anthony Hopkins |
| COMEDIAN: Tommy Cooper |

"What are you doing?" It's like looking at an old prune."

Now does Salford-born John share Pete's fixation with Manchester United. In fact, he hates football with a passion.

"I can stand it, I can bear it. I've never been to a match and I don't intend to."

And this loathing stems from, what, dare I ask?

"At school I was a bit bullied, Mike," he tells me. "Sport is how I bond with people, and I'm not good. So they'd put me in goal, and when happens? You let the ball in and then they laugh at you. It just grew from there."

He's also unmervered by football's tribal aspect. "I get accounts when I hear groups of men swearing like sailors in bars."

"I go, 'Oh God!' Maybe in a past life I was at the Battle of Bannockburn. That's what it feels like."

Not that he lacks a competitive streak.

"I do well at quiz nights. I'm a walking sport I've had the time to read, study and learn. Knowledge is power and it's paid off. I've won Tipping Point, Point-

less, won 150 grand on The Chase, although that was as a team. And I came second on Celebrity Mastermind and Fifteen To One."

"Over the years I've raised absolute fortunes for various charities, which is brilliant." And tonight, of course, he'll help boost the coffers of the RSPCA, Scottish SPCA, Donkey Sanctuary, Scottish Airline Foundation and Blue Cross.

So I guess my final question should be: Are you a bit of a show-off?

"OK, here goes: John Thomson, if you could be reincarnated as an animal, which would it be?"

Surprisingly, he doesn't hesitate. John must have thought about this before.

"I'm a bit of a show-off," he tells me. "Really."

"Yeah, they can live to nearly 200 years old, Mike."

And he'd seriously want to do that?

"Well, it beats coming back as a fly."

"Help! The Animals At Christmas" is on tonight at 8pm on Channel 5. For campaign details go to channel5.com/helptheanimals

GOLD FEAT:
Actor John is hosting a creative animal fundraiser.
Left, with Cold Feet co-stars

