



# FROM HOT POTATOES TO VIRAL FAME

Two brothers from Preston with a vision, a passion and a lot of potatoes have taken the world of social media by storm and put Preston firmly on the map. *Ali Gudgeon* catches up with the popular duo.

Photography: We Create Popular

**J**ake and Harley Nelson are the names behind the viral sensation Spud Bros – two brothers serving up hot potatoes with a side of Northern humour from their famous food truck on Preston’s Flag Market. With a blend of authentic personality, cheeky TikToks and a pinch of local charm, they have made waves in the street food scene and raised the profile of their hometown.

After taking over the hot potato tram 15 months ago, the sibling duo decided to start posting on TikTok to market themselves to the thousands of students that live in Preston. Instead of highly edited videos, they wanted to bring ‘a lot of northern humour’ to their content.

On their popular TikTok account where they have amassed over 3 million followers, they film videos about working on the van, how to keep customers happy and even give away free food sometimes – one of their most popular videos has almost 20 million views!

After going viral on TikTok and with rave reviews, people have been flocking to the heart of Lancashire from all over the world, including as far afield as Australia, Turkey, Spain, Germany and Amsterdam. A queue will form outside the potato tram way before they open at 11.30am and if you ask almost anyone in the queue why they’ve headed there, they’ll all say they have seen the Spud Bros on TikTok.

The much-loved jacket potato dates back to 1955. This is when Ernie Rhodes set up his Hot Potato Tram on the Preston Flag Market. In 1978 Ernie’s nephew Keith Roberts purchased the tram from him. Sadly, Keith passed away from cancer in 2020 and family friend Tony Nelson took over the famous hot potato tram. In business with his two sons, Jacob and Harley, the tram has gone from strength to strength over the past four years. In November 2023 Jake and Harley officially took over the family business and Spud Bros was formed.



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Using the brothers’ knack for social media and noticing the popularity of the humble baked potato online, the Spud Brothers have cemented themselves in popular food culture.

Jake, who before taking over the tram was a business development manager for natural food products, said: “From day one our mission has been to inspire the younger generation. We wanted to take a small family business and make it global. By sharing our journey on social media we’ve been able to take millions of people along for the ride.

“I think our popularity stems from our authenticity – what you see is what you get. We’re consistent, we show up every day. And of course, we bring the Prestonian banter and the good vibes.”

With a variety of options for spud lovers, every potato tells a story and they aren’t just baked; they are transformed. From the buttery warmth of a traditional jacket potato to the rich, cheesy indulgence of signature toppings, each spud is a culinary masterpiece.



Jake explains: “We took the jacket potato and put our own twist on it. We’ve elevated it. Our most popular filling is beans, cheese, our famous tram sauce and crispy onions. The Spud Bros Classic!” You can’t beat a classic jacket potato. But other options include loaded chilli spuds, tuna and mayo, chicken curry and zesty sour cream toppers.

It’s been a busy time for the boys of late. Back in November they hosted a 30-hour Spudathon to help raise money for Children in Need. Starting at Manchester’s MediaCity, a ‘Spudsy’ potato was created as part of the fundraiser, which saw other spud sellers across the UK also taking part in the special charity event. Jake and Harvey completed the fundraising event on Preston’s Flag Market. Jake said: “It was very intense – we were so full of adrenaline which kept us going. It’s always nice to do things for a good cause and we were blown away by the support from our local community.”

The viral sensations were also recognised in the city’s ‘High Street Heroes’ Awards last year, with the Spud Bros taking home three awards: Outstanding Achievement in Retail,



Proud Preston Award and Jake picked up the Customer Service Star – Retail Award. An amazing result, considering it was their first year at the helm.

But the biggest news for the potato kings has to be the opening of a pop-up in London’s Soho, SpudBros Express. Jake said: “We’re bringing the greatest spud on earth to the capital! We’ve got a short-term lease for three months and if it takes off like we think it will, there are plans to expand Spud Bros even further.

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“The number one priority is customers. We opened in London as it’s the capital and when we are getting people travelling to us from all over the world, from a footfall perspective, it just makes sense. Since we launched, we’ve been selling out every day, it’s been incredible. We’re excited for what 2025 holds, the plan is to open locations around the UK.”

When asked what fans can expect for the new year, Jake adds: “More shops, more spuds, all the vibes. You might even see us go international. We’re asking people where they would love to see a Spud Bros Express next – you can vote for your town on our website.”

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