



The Grand Tour's Luckiest Man

The TV star owes his success to fast cars, beautiful roads and the occasional near-death experience

Text by KEITH GORDON

First as a host of the BBC's *Top Gear*, which was the world's most watched factual program reaching hundreds of millions of global fans, and now on the immensely popular *The Grand Tour*, Richard Hammond lives the life most men dream of; driving the world's greatest cars, tackling some of Earth's most beautiful and challenging roads and regions, and getting paid millions of dollars to

do it. But there's been an unfortunate dark side to this dream existence. Cars crash, and cars going fast crash even harder, a truism that has nearly ended the show, as well as Richard Hammond's life, on more than one occasion.

Amazon Prime Video's *The Grand Tour* retains many of the automotive and comedic aspects of *Top Gear*, but gives Hammond, Jeremy Clarkson and James May more free-

dom and control over their show, in addition to a larger budget. The result has been epic, with humorous adventures in Africa balanced by serious reviews of the top supercars and luxury vehicles of the moment.

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When Hammond strapped into a jet engine-powered vehicle while filming an episode of *Top Gear*, it seemed extreme, even for a show that regularly pushed boundaries. A few moments after leaving the start line, he lost control of the beastly machine which began tumbling through a grassy field, eventually coming to a stop with Hammond, by sheer luck, alive albeit badly injured; badly enough to put the entire show's future in jeopardy, which surely must have made him reconsider the risks inherent in filming a show at 200 mph-plus.

And then in 2017, he was involved in another horrific crash in Switzerland, this time

at the wheel of a \$1 million Rimac Concept_One electric supercar. Failing to slow down enough to navigate a turn he careened down a hillside, narrowly missing a house before bursting into flames. His fellow presenters figured they'd just watched their friend die in a fireball; and yet, for the second time, Hammond survived an accident that likely should have killed him.

Accepting the risks, Amazon has just picked up the show for a fourth season. As Hammond, May and Clarkson continue, they've tweaked the format, eliminating many of the duller segments and celebrity appearances in exchange for more of the absurd escapades that made them so popular in the first place. Season 3, currently on Amazon Prime, features some remote locales that push the presenters out of their comfort zones, both culturally as well as physically, especially as they struggled to cross an immense desert in Mongolia - sans alcohol.

"It was absolutely horrendous in that sense," Hammond relates. "Normally we drink heavily and talk utter rubbish to entertain ourselves when we're not filming. So those two elements - the lack of one, and the presence of the other - were soul-crushing. The weather was also brutal.... We weren't properly kitted out, we hadn't brought the right stuff so we were bloody cold, wet and miserable. It was an endlessly long day with all three of us sharing a car. That's when I was most irritated: all three of us in a row in this stupid car that they wouldn't let me drive because they thought I'd crash." Not, perhaps, totally unreasonable, but still....



Above: The charred remains of the Rimac electric hypercar after Hammond crashed during a hill climb event, narrowly surviving. Below: A recent episode brought the men to Colorado to test old Jaguar cars in inhospitable terrain, such as a ski trail