

James Max became a familiar face as a semi-finalist on the TV show *The Apprentice*. Now known as the 'Voice of London' on LBC radio, he lives in Chelsea and drives a G-Wiz.

ME & MY CAR



DC What was it like being on *The Apprentice*?

JM I was on the first series, billed as a documentary, and nobody knew then what a success it was going to be. A lot of people think that it changes your life because there are lots of offers arriving in your lap. There is this myth that when you take part in a show like that, everyone thinks you are amazing and offers you a job. The reality is somewhat different. Business doesn't really like television or people who have been on TV. But if you want to go in a different direction, it does give you a platform to do so. When you are hemmed into a job with benefits, a lot of people stay in their comfort zone. I was thrown out of mine by *The Apprentice*.

DC Tell us about Lord Sugar, what's he really like? How did you get on with him?

JM I really like him. He is a very likeable bloke, and a very clever man. He has an exceptionally strong work ethic, but he also has a myopic view of life. He is driven by business at such a high profile level.

DC Do you have any regrets about doing the programme?

JM I loved being associated with something that turned out to be so popular. The tasks have to be televisually friendly, so they have to be quite simple, but each of them draws on some aspect of business, and it doesn't get away from the raw skills you need to be a success. I still have the satisfaction of having been on the winning team eight times out of ten – more than anyone else. You have to adapt to what happens, and whether I was a leader or a team player, I was quite good at sorting things out. I do regret that although the programme is now more successful than ever, it's a shame that it's become something of a TV circus.

DC Did it change your life?

JM Yes it did, but that was because I took myself in a different direction, not because of anything falling in my lap. It allowed me time to pause and think, to experience and try new things. That's a privilege and a luxury at age 35, because most people by then are stuck in a career. You're only here once and you have to take opportunities as they arise.

DC How did you become involved with LBC?

JM After *The Apprentice*, I did a lot of radio interviews, and people said that I seemed to have the knack of it and that I have a very distinctive voice. I started by doing some newspaper reviews, then I got a call saying the business presenter on LBC had resigned and they would try me out. That was in 2005 and I'm still there. I do the Saturday breakfast show, Sunday current affairs show and I've presented the Drive Time show.

DC What was your first car?

JM A gold Fiat Panda – it was awful. Why could I not have had a Mini like other

trendy people my age? Because my Dad was obsessed with a particular garage that only sold Volvos and Fiats.

DC Why did you choose the cars you have now?

JM There's only me and my dog Barney, who's a Bassett Fauve, and I have an Aston Martin DB7 Vantage and the G-Wiz. To be honest, I don't need the Aston – I hardly drive it, but it's a beautiful, responsive, invigorating car to drive. I bought it as a trophy, for cruising and long distance. Mostly I drive the G-Wiz or take the bus. People laugh at me either way.

DC Why did you want a G-Wiz? It's not great to drive, is it?

JM No, it's without question the worst car I have ever owned, but it's so bad, it's good. For pottering around London, it's actually fantastic. I don't particularly care about it, but it's quite funny when tourists point at you and take pictures. With the dog beside me in the car I look like Wallace and Gromit. It gets me where I want to go, it goes at the national speed limit, there's no noise, and it's fantastic but only because of the parking: it can park anywhere in the Borough of Westminster on a meter for four hours for free, and there's a scheme where you can buy subsidised parking in car parks. There's no congestion charge, it's just so cheap and convenient. Though if I'm honest, the G-Wiz would go immediately if Westminster Council ever rescinded that policy about parking.

DC How far can you go in it?

JM The outer limit is about 35 to 40 miles on a good day with a following wind.

DC How long does charging take?

JM I leave it on trickle charge in the garage overnight. If I have really spanked it around

town, I will also charge it at work during the day. I bought a long lease on a garage five minutes' dog walking distance from home, and that's where I keep it. Although it's a bit ironic that the Aston lives in the street in residents' parking, and the G-Wiz lives in the garage for charging.

DC Have you had any problems with it?

JM None at all. It has been 100 per cent reliable.

DC Do you think you are helping save the planet by driving a G-Wiz?

JM No. Look, I have an electric motor vehicle that is made in India that will probably kill me if I crash it. It uses electricity made by coal-fuelled power stations that cause pollution. But it works for me 24/7 and I can use it whenever I like, which beats public transport. I don't understand what it is that drives ministers on their transport policy to favour electric cars. These people have obviously never lived with an electric car and seen the limitations that exist. You cannot have just an electric car for all your journeys.

DC Maybe some would consider your car choice, a G-Wiz and Aston Martin, a bit eccentric?

JM Yes, but my eccentric choice of cars is about the odd lifestyle I have, working at odd times. I need to be able to get to work

late at night when I need to, or during the day and not have to worry about parking. For playtime, I like the journey to be in something more notable.

DC Did you consider a Prius?

JM The tax incentives aren't there. You don't get the free parking that I get with the G-Wiz, and you don't get the subsidised space – it doesn't work economically. It's an ugly car that drives badly. I think it's hideous, but not so awful that it's enjoyable.

DC Or a Nissan Leaf?

JM The Nissan Leaf is too expensive for what it is. Even with the subsidy it's about £10,000 too much.

DC Have you ever thought about commuting by bike instead??

JM I'm very tempted by that, but it's a summer thing. When the sun is coming out over London, a bike ride in the sunshine would be a delight. But the rest of the time it would be pouring down with rain, and you'd get drenched. Some people assume that because I live where I do and how I speak, I have delusions of grandeur or I am a posh git, but I'm not. The thing that drives me to make decisions about transport is about being efficient with my money rather than about the environment.

DC Where do you drive the G-Wiz?

JM Commuting to work, to Leicester Square, Canary Wharf, Islington, to see my parents in north west London – all quite short trips. I always worry about it running out of juice, but it hasn't happened yet. It has made me realise that if you live in central London, how little distance you cover in an average day. An electric car won't suit anybody who has to do longer journeys, because you'd always be paranoid about running out, but it works for me.

DC What do you listen to in the car?

JM I know it sounds rather sad and tragic, but I often listen to LBC – the radio station that I work for. I don't very often tune in to other radio stations, but when I do it's Classic FM, which I prefer over Radio 3 because that's too up itself. Capital and Heart are good too – I like the play lists. But mostly I listen to my own stuff on a modern mix. I have 8,500 CDs and 33,000 tracks on iTunes. I listen to a lot of music, and I border on being obsessed with different music genres. I like Lemon Jelly, Chris Joss, Duran Duran's new album and Take That's latest album. My music choices are a bit like my car choices, a combination of mainstream, sometimes tacky, sometimes eclectic, always very listenable and just a little bit eccentric. **DC**

