

# It ain't half odd mum

## It Ain't Half Hot Mum

**When did it run?** January 1974–September 1981  
**How many episodes?** 56  
**Who starred in it?** Windsor Davies, Melvyn Hayes, Don Estelle

Jimmy Perry and David Croft are widely regarded as two of our greatest comedy writers, with hits including *Dad's Army*, *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* and *Hi-de-Hi!* When, a couple of years before *The Fall and Rise of Reggie Perrin*, they were casting *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*, Leonard Rossiter was auditioned for the part of Sergeant Major Williams, eventually filled by Windsor Davies.

However, they were less than impressed by Rossiter's arrogance, when he demanded that the part be rewritten to how he saw it should read. "An

ensemble cast can only cope with so much ego and mine's big enough anyway," says Croft. They told Rossiter in no uncertain terms where to go, "and I think we were right to do so".

Following *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*, Perry and Croft moved on to *Hi-de-Hi!*, which drew on their experiences in the holiday camps. "Jimmy himself had been a Redcoat," explains Croft, "so I suppose you could say he was the equivalent of Spike in the series."

Croft and Perry spent more than two years trying for someone

to fill the role of Ted Bovis, looking at almost every northern comic actor out there, as well as Welshman Harry Secombe, before eventually discovering Paul Shane while watching *Coronation Street*. "Paul had won the Comedy of the North competition for quite a few years, so he was perfect," says Croft.

As they used a proper holiday camp for filming, all the episodes had to be shot out of season. One year they memorably filmed into mid-October, meaning the pool was extremely cold. They tried to

use steam heaters to warm up the water, "but only succeeded in getting the temperature up to about 49°F," says Croft. "For one shot, Jeffrey Holland [Spike] jumped in and managed to spend about 45 seconds in there before shouting, 'David, I've got to get out.' We got the take, though!"



**SPACE FOR TWO MORE**  
 The idea of *Red Dwarf* with Alfred Molina and Alan Rickman requires a leap of the imagination – but isn't that what sci-fi is all about?

## Red Dwarf

**When did it run?** February 1988–April 1999  
**How many episodes?** 52  
**Who starred in it?** Chris Barrie, Craig Charles, Robert Llewellyn, Danny John-Jules

Ever compared *Red Dwarf* to *Porridge*? Well, maybe you should and maybe you shouldn't. Creators Rob Grant and Doug Naylor were such fans of the prison comedy that they transcribed episodes and studied how it was written in depth. And in a bid to get the show commissioned, they sold it as "*Porridge* in space". "There are similar elements," explains Naylor, "such as the confined space, bunk beds and our use of 'smeg', in the same way that *Porridge* popularised 'naff'."

"However, once we got the green light and were left to our own devices, we went back to our original plan of doing a sci-fi comedy."

"I think *Red Dwarf*, but instead of Craig Charles and Chris Barrie, think Alfred Molina and Alan Rickman. They were

originally on board for the parts of Rimmer and Lister. "We were aware that it might take more than one series for us

to get *Red Dwarf* right," admits Naylor, "and we knew that with Alan and Alfred on board, we'd probably only get one series out of them. So we changed the casting."

The character of Kryten wasn't even in the first two series as a main character. Grant and Naylor realised they desperately needed someone else to do physical things. "We had a hologram, a maudlin computer, a human cat and the last man in the universe," says Naylor. "Kryten's character had been a success as a one-off in series two, so we decided to introduce it."

However, David Ross, who had played Kryten first, was filming Alan Bleasdale's *GBH* at the time, and couldn't take the role, giving Robert Llewellyn the chance.

*Red Dwarf* was rejected three times before being commissioned. One BBC comedy executive, Gareth Gwenlan, was dead against it, saying, "You can't have a sitcom in space. There's no settee." Grant and Naylor were so annoyed that they ended up using Gwenlan's name as one of the show's swearwords. Rob Mansfield *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* and *Red Dwarf* both feature in this series of *Comedy Connections*, along with: *The Goodies*, *Birds of a Feather*, *Father Ted*, *Hi-de-Hi!*, *The Young Ones* and *Keeping Up Appearances*.

Links [www.bbc.co.uk/comedy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy)

As BBC1 looks back at the birth of some classic sitcoms, we reveal some near misses that could have changed TV comedy as we know it

**COMEDY** Comedy Connections Tuesday BBC1



"HOW DO YOU SPELL 'NAFF', MR PERRIN?" This is how it nearly was, with Ronnie Barker in place of Leonard Rossiter (inset)

looked. The scene where Reggie took off his clothes was filmed on a beach in Dorset, on a hot August day. The beach was crammed full of 3,000 sun-worshippers, so all of them had to be cleared out of the way – they then stood around watching the sequence being shot.

Nobbs started out in TV by sending sketches to David Frost on *That Was the Week That Was*. When his jokes began to be used by Frost in 1962, he didn't even own a TV, and had to go to a friend's house to see his sketches being broadcast!



## The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin

**When did it run?** September 1976–January 1979  
**How many episodes?** 21  
**Who starred in it?** Leonard Rossiter, Pauline Yates, John Barron, Sue Nicholls

When David Nobbs, the creator of the comedy *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*, began adapting his novel for the small screen, he desperately wanted Ronnie Barker to play the lead. "I didn't know Leonard Rossiter at all, and had just been writing for *The Two Ronnies*, so it was only natural," says Nobbs. "Ronnie had read my novel and loved it, so I naturally thought of him. Now, of course, I can't imagine anyone other than Leonard in the role. In fact, by the time I wrote the second and third series, I always had a combination of Reggie and Leonard in my

head when I wrote the dialogue." At the time Rossiter was a well-known face in ITV's sitcom *Rising Damp*. "Leonard invited me on to the set to meet him and then deliberately threw a tantrum in front of me," Nobbs recalls. But in spite of Rossiter's arrogance, Nobbs still remembers him fondly. "Fortunately, we got on very well – in fact, I remember it as a very happy time on set. I was always astounded at how he combined delivering lines at such speed, with such subtlety."

Amazing as it seems now, Nobbs doesn't even remember the first time he wrote the infamous catchphrase "I didn't get where I am today...". "You don't set out to write catchphrases," says Nobbs. "That one just gradually crept in."

The melancholic opening titles of *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* weren't as lonely as they

looked. The scene where Reggie took off his clothes was filmed on a beach in Dorset, on a hot August day. The beach was crammed full of 3,000 sun-worshippers, so all of them had to be cleared out of the way – they then stood around watching the sequence being shot.

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