



The grown-up test

ALAN TITCHMARSH

Our unique test to see how old you really are. Since you hit 50 Alan (real age 59) have you:

Drunk too much? I've drunk too much but not so that I'd be drunk. I hate hangovers. It's three days off the booze after that.

Been flirted with? They have to keep wiping the lipstick off my waxwork at Madame Tussauds. It's very flattering, I'm not complaining. When they meet me, women of a certain age come over "all unnecessary", as my mother would have said. I don't claim to understand it or expect it but when it happens it's rather pleasant. All you can do is laugh it off.

Dressed inappropriately for your age? I think we are much younger than our parents were at the same age, so I'm not sure there is much that is inappropriate. But I have reached a stage in life where there are certain things I wouldn't do, like I wouldn't wear my shirt outside my trousers, not unless it's a polo shirt.

Dyed your hair? No I haven't. Nobody believes me. I wouldn't because I'm curious to see what happens. I've been incredibly lucky, I've got a few grey hairs in there but I've still got brown hair rather than grey. I liked Ronald

Reagan's line when asked if he dyed his hair. He said, "My hair's exactly the same colour as the day I bought it."

Danced in an embarrassing way? My grown-up daughters used to tell me that when I'm dancing I pull a face which looks as if I'm in pain, so I try to smile when I'm doing it now.

Written racy sex scenes? People think I got that award for bad sex writing in my novels but I didn't really get it. Sebastian Faulks got it but it was given to me because he didn't turn up. So I deny ever having received it. I like to think that what I write is tasteful rather than racy. Why people are so embarrassed and snigger at our

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age about sex I don't know. It's the stuff of life, as long as it's not sordid and tasteless.

Can you be too old to write about sex? I'll tell you when I get there.

What's your favourite kid's joke? What's grey with a trunk? A mouse going on holiday. And there's a follow-up, what's brown with a trunk? A mouse coming back from holiday.

Driven a convertible? I've got a Jaguar XK8 convertible and that's lovely to drive, wonderful. I'm a fresh-air fiend, an outdoors man, so I like a lid that comes off.

Find that politicians are getting younger? I am at that scary age where the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Prime Minister are younger than me. You think, what do they know about anything, they're far too young. Other people can sometimes pull the wool over your eyes by looking terribly grown up but you know that inside he's still little Gordon Brown aged seven, thinking "I'm getting away with it." I always cherish Beatrix Potter's line, which was that it's very important to keep the child in you alive. It keeps your feet on the ground and reminds you that you're just the same as anybody else but perhaps sometimes a bit luckier.

VERDICT? Alan, we've got to hand it to you. Not only do you not look your age, you don't act it either. You can be a virtual **49** ▶

DISAPPEARING BRITAIN

The black cab
You wouldn't credit it guv. They've only gone and put the kibosh on the classic black cab, the venerable FX4 Fairway model that's such an enduring feature of our major towns and cities. Famed for its unmistakable engine rattle, tight turning circle, and reasoned liberal philosophy from the driving seat, it even became the preferred choice of car for an unlikely band of admirers including Prince Philip, Stephen Fry and Kate Moss. But they're not making them any more, and the old ones are being crushed in increasing numbers. It's a diabolical liberty.

