

'What I know at 75'

Charismatic Welsh musical icon, sex symbol and evergreen global chart-topper **TOM JONES, 75**, looks back on a life very well lived

He's sold more than 100 million records, won a Grammy and two Brit Awards and produced countless timeless hits.

From his '60s heyday with the likes of *It's Not Unusual*, *Delilah* and *Green, Green Grass of Home*, to his big Noughties comeback when songs such as *Mama Told Me Not to Come* and *Sex Bomb* won him legions of new fans, the music of Tom Jones has been the soundtrack to our lives. As popular as ever, the silver-haired heart-throb reflects with *Yours* on almost 60 years of marriage, fatherhood and his greatest achievement.

Life on the road at 75... These days, I take much better care of myself. When you're young you can go a few drinks over the top and easily bounce back the next day, but when you're older it's not the case! I don't drink like I used to; I'll have some wine with dinner, but that's about it. I don't stay up all night drinking and clubbing like I did when I was young. Nowadays, I try to keep as fit as possible: I walk, I've got a gym in my house in LA and I'll use hotel gyms while I'm on the road, so I'm always trying to keep active. I know that if I want to perform at the level

that I do – and if I want my voice to sound as good as it does – then I have to protect *everything*. When you're young you feel invincible, but you learn to pace yourself. I have...

Six decades of marriage... Linda's been with me all the way – she's kept me grounded. We met and fell in love as teenagers and we're still in love. When you know one another so well, it's a great feeling to still have that person with you and I've been luckily enough to have that. Growing up together in the '50s, we both loved rock'n'roll music. She was with me when I bought my first guitar and when I bought my first record. She knew I wanted to be a singer and she supported me in my dream. I'll be 76 in June and my wife just turned 75 in January and it's great to still be together after all this time. We're part of one another.

The song that made a career... I knew when I heard *It's Not Unusual* that it was a hit song. I remember saying that I had to do it. I'd been told that my "big voice" didn't work commercially anymore, but

luckily I proved all the naysayers wrong with the success of the song.

Becoming a dad at 16... The day my son was born, I grew a foot taller. It gave me more drive and determination to succeed. And now – all these years later – to have Mark working as my manager, well, I couldn't wish for anything better. He knows me so well, he knows what I'm like. It's not like having a stranger as a manager, there's more to it: he's my blood. When my old manager passed away more than 25 years ago and Mark took over, my career had a new lease of life and he made me aware of a lot of things which I'd let slip. We argue, but it's beneficial as we both just want the best outcome. It's a great relationship.

Growing up in Wales... I realise how fortunate I've been to come from such a loving family. I'm from a coalmining area in south Wales and I always had so much family around me; my mother was the youngest of six children, my father also the youngest of six. Growing up after the war also meant there was a closeness with our neighbours, a real sense of community. Where I came from is so important to me, which is why I wanted to reflect on [it] in my autobiography [*Over the Top and Back*]. I lived in Wales for the first 24 years of my life; it made me who I am today.

Tips for following in his footsteps... Stick to your guns, because you will come up against some obstacles, which I obviously did. When I first went to London, the record labels wanted groups, because of the likes of

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TEXT: PAUL LEWART PICTURES: GETTY IMAGES; REX SHUTTERSTOCK



SEX BOMB
In the '70s, Tom forged a reputation as an energetic live act

the Beatles and the Stones, and you had to look a certain way. I was told I was too macho and that my curly hair "didn't work" – imagine being told that! They wanted me to change the way I looked, to be more boyish and change the way I sang. Thankfully I didn't. You can't have somebody change you into a person you're not in order to be fashionable or to sell records. You've got to be true to yourself. I stuck to my guns and it worked.

An honour above all others... Being knighted. I never, *ever* expected that. To sell records and make a living from it was a dream come true. But to get a knighthood was above and beyond anything I could've dreamed of.

On being a grandfather... My granddaughter is 28, and my grandson is 32. It's great when I do a concert and I know that they're there – it's an amazing feeling to know that they like what I do.

The future... I don't know what I'll be doing next or when the next album will be. One thing's for sure, I'll continue to sing. It's a passion that's as strong as when I started. That's never going to change. ●

Tom Jones is touring in March. Visit livenation.com.au



MAN MANAGEMENT
These days son Mark guides Tom's career



THE YOUNG ONES
Linda, Tom and Mark at the family home in the UK in 1967