

**EXCLUSIVE** by **DUNCAN LARCOMBE**,  
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## TV Stig Ben Collins trained SAS heroes in daring "escape and evade" driving skills while serving with the regiment, *The Sun* can reveal.

Millions of viewers have seen the race ace coaching celebrities on how to achieve the fastest time around a TV circuit in *Top Gear*'s reasonably-priced car.

But sources close to the special forces unit – motto *Who Dares Wins* – last night told how he also passed on his expertise to British troops.

And they revealed they had known his secret identity as *The Stig* ever since he landed the job on the BBC's flagship motoring show in 2003 – even though fans were in the dark.

Collins, 35, whose face was hidden from viewers by his race helmet's tinted visor, trained in hand-to-hand combat with the SAS before passing on his driving skills.

He was axed from his TV role last night after winning a legal bid to reveal his identity by publishing his memoirs.

Beeb bosses had claimed the stunt driver was bound by a confidentiality agreement and that revealing *The Stig*'s true identity would ruin viewers' fun. But after a two-day private hearing at London's High Court, Mr Justice Morgan refused to grant an injunction which would stop publishers HarperCollins releasing *The Man In The White Suit* in two weeks.

Insiders said sports car ace Collins, from Bristol, would be given the push when the series returns for its 16th series later this year.

One said: "Bosses are livid. There's no way they'll welcome him back."

"He's not a full-time employee, just contracted on a per-series basis,



Behind you . . . with *Top Gear* trio

whether to axe *The Stig* entirely or bring him back as someone else."

Collins, who replaced black-clad *Stig* Perry McCarthy, rushed from court at one point to visit wife Georgina who had just given birth to their third child Cassius.

And with his TV identity finally made public last night, *The Sun* can detail his proud military past.

Collins served as a member of the renowned 23 SAS, the regiment of highly-trained reservists.

There, chiefs quickly began using him to pass on his driving skills. One fellow SAS member said:

so it'll be easy not to renew his deal. Producers are still deciding

"We've known he was *The Stig* all along – it has been a standing joke within the regiment. He worked as a course instructor in Hereford.

"On the driving tracks he helped pass on his knowledge of high-speed escape and evade tactics."

### Weapon

Sun security expert and former SAS legend Andy McNab said: "Having the best driving skills are a vital part of SAS training. They need to know how to use a vehicle as a form of escape and also a weapon.

"The SAS also need to know how to drive safely at high speeds, and that's where *The Stig* would come in handy. Anyone within the Regiment with the skills he has would

have been seized on straight away." Only a handful of people on *Top Gear* knew the identity of *The Stig* – including hosts Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May.

Last night HarperCollins called the court ruling "a victory for freedom of speech", while a BBC spokeswoman said the Corporation had not ruled out pushing for damages.

Critics blasted the Beeb for spending tens of thousands of pounds of licence fee-payers' cash on the case.

MP Phillip Davies, a member of the House of Commons culture select committee, said: "I fully expected the BBC to lose the case.

"Pursuing a case they have virtually no chance of winning is completely futile because his name was out there." [d.larcombe@the-sun.co.uk](mailto:d.larcombe@the-sun.co.uk)



Winning driver . . . Collins leaves court yesterday. Right, SAS emblem



- 2003** PERRY outs himself and black Stig is "killed off". White Stig replaces him.
- 2005** RUMOURS over F1's Mark Webber after Clarkson gives him 1 Am Stig T-shirt.
- 2006** EX-world F1 champ Damon Hill appears on show and jokes he may be Stig.
- 2008** STIG collects *Top Gear*'s National TV Award for best factual programme.
- 2009** F1 star Michael Schumacher is "revealed" as Stig in a stunt by Clarkson.
- 2010** THE Stig greets show's biggest ever guests – Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz.

# TOP GEAR



## A STIG'S LIFE

**BEN** Collins was born in Bristol but spent his first ten years in California where his dad worked.

He became a junior Olympic standard swimmer by the age of nine but at 18 launched his driving career in Formula Ford.

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In 2001 he raced at the Le Mans 24-hour classic — and for four hours, in the rain, was fastest in his class.

He has also driven in British ASCAR oval racing and in 2003 won six of 12 rounds. In 2009 Ben became a driver for an Australian V8 Supercars team.

He was also a stuntman driving in 2008 Bond movie *Quantum Of Solace*.

Star pals . . . with Cameron and Tom

