“I’M A CONTROL FREAK”

Gordon **RAMSAY**

The king of culinary TV, Gordon Ramsay is serving up *MasterChef Australia*’s 12th season and its three new judges. A dad again at 53, he tells **Susan Horsburgh** about freaking out in the delivery room, his caveman image, and trying to raise normal kids, despite the family fortune.

Gordon Ramsay wants to make one thing clear: the only reason he didn’t witness the births of his first four children was that his wife banned him from the delivery room. “Tana didn’t f*cking want me there!” says the 53-year-old celebrity chef. “And all of a sudden [I’m] denounced as this oaf.”

When the couple’s fifth child arrived last April, however – 17 years after their fourth – Gordon wasn’t taking no for an answer. “I said, ‘F*ck it, I’m going to be there,’” he says, and Tana happily gave in. Now Gordon wishes she hadn’t – because he was out cold within seconds of Oscar’s arrival.

Gordon remembers putting on some calming Ed Sheeran in the operating room, but then the bloody reality of a C-section proved too much for him. He fainted for the first time in his life, just as the nurse was handing him his newborn son.

“It was hot in there, there was no air-conditioning, and the floor looked like the middle of a f*ckin’ abattoir,” he recalls. “I’m not good at that stuff. I know my strengths and that was my weakness.”

It seems a rare moment of humility from the king of culinary TV, a chef who has trained under some of the world’s best, and built a global empire of eateries from England to Italy and the US, collecting Michelin stars with his talent, drive and formidable perfectionism. “I’m a control freak,” he says. “I put my white jacket on and there’s no compromise.”

It’s his foul mouth and fiery temper, though, that have scored him fans on reality TV, starring as gastronomic adjudicator on shows like *Hell’s Kitchen* and *Kitchen Nightmares* – entertaining and appalling viewers in equal measure.

Squeezing in a chat with *The Weekly* during his six days filming the upcoming series of *MasterChef Australia* in Melbourne in January, he waits less than eight minutes to launch his first F-bomb. No, he hasn’t mellowed with age, he insists, despite what anyone says: “I call it as it is. Some people embrace that, some people find that offensive, but what I do is get results. You can’t please f*ckin’ everybody.”

Wisecracks and withering putdowns are part of the Gordon Ramsay brand, which might explain the reaction →



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when he made his first appearance before the contestants on *MasterChef Australia: Back to Win*, the latest serving of the hit show, featuring favourites from the past 11 seasons. "There were a few gasps," says Gordon, revelling in his take-no-prisoners persona. "Was I straight to the point this week on *MasterChef*? I had to be, because [otherwise] they're going to say, 'Now you're not being true to you.'"

The big *MasterChef Australia* news, of course, is the changing of the guard, after the unceremonious exit last year of judges George Calombaris, Gary Mehigan and Matt Preston, when contract negotiations with Network 10 broke down. Gordon introduces the top 24 to the new trio: food writer Melissa Leong, three-hatted chef Jock Zonfrillo, and 2012 *MasterChef Australia* winner Andy Allen.

"It was sad to see the three guys go, but I think change is good," says Gordon. "They got so comfortable that it was a home run for them every year. When you reach that level of success sometimes you feel you don't need to strive for it, so it's quite nice working with three hungry, focused, new judges."

Popular overseas, especially in the UK and India, *MasterChef Australia* has piggybacked on the rising international profile of Australian food, he says, fuelled by a fascination with its multicultural influences. "Everyone used to think it was a nation of beers and barbecues," says Gordon, who raves about recent meals at Melbourne's Supernormal and Hobart's Fico. "It's way more sophisticated than that and has been for many years."

Now an arbiter of gastronomic good taste, Gordon was once more passionate about football than food. Born in Glasgow and raised on a council estate in England's Stratford-upon-Avon, Gordon was intent on a sporting career until injury put an end to his football ambitions. He studied hotel management instead, later training as a chef with the likes of Marco Pierre White in London and Guy Savoy in France.

In 1993, he became head chef of London's Aubergine, and within three years the restaurant was awarded two Michelin stars. At 31, he struck out on his own, opening Restaurant Gordon Ramsay in London and nabbing three Michelin stars – the highest accolade in the culinary world. Two decades on, he has more than 35 restaurants worldwide and is ranked number 35 on the *Forbes Celebrity 100* rich list, with earnings of $95.5 million in 2019 alone.

It's an extraordinary reversal of fortune for a boy who grew up in poverty, "often afraid and ashamed", the second of four children with a violent alcoholic for a father. Gordon senior, who once represented Scotland in swimming, was a sometime welder, newsagent and swimming instructor who used to call his family "council house shits". Gordon has described his dad as a "hard-drinking womaniser", but Gordon's mother, a nurse, never left him, despite the abuse, which included a brutal beating when she was seven months pregnant.

Embarrassed his parents didn't own their home and adamant his future would be different, Gordon bought his first flat at 19, which he says gave him the financial security to make bold, strategic career moves. Gordon senior, who died of a heart attack in 1997 at the age of 53, also served as a guide for how not to father. "I learnt how to become a great dad," he says, "opposite to what I experienced."

Perhaps surprisingly, Gordon paints himself as a softie with his children: 22-year-old Megan, 20-year-old twins Holly and Jack, 18-year-old Matilda and 11-month-old Oscar. "I don't see them as much as Tana," explains Gordon, who splits his time between London and Los Angeles, "so when I see them I don't want fall-outs."

Tana has said that people have the wrong impression of her husband: "When Megan brings a boy home you can see in his eyes he's terrified, but Gordon will be the first to make him feel at home. He loves being surrounded by the kids and their friends."

On his daughter's CBBC cooking show, *Matilda and the Ramsay Bunch*, Gordon is often the butt of his kids' jokes, like the time they pranked him on Father's Day and had one of his Ferraris supposedly repossessed. Then again, Tilly does admit to being nervous when she whips up a fine-dining family meal for her dad's 50th. Gordon asks why and she replies, "Because you're you!" In another episode, she jokes her mum is the only person her father is afraid of.

Matilda has had to turn down shooting season six of her show to concentrate on her A levels this year – she wants to study medicine – while Megan works in PR in London and the twins are at university, Jack studying English and Holly fashion. Watching them leave the nest is "horrible", says Gordon, but seeing them each carve out their own niche has been satisfying: "It sort of confirmed that we hadn't over-mollycoddled them."

Tana, once a Montessori-trained teacher, is apparently the disciplinarian of the pair. She runs a tight ship, monitoring the kids' bank accounts to make sure they're not spending their $200 allowances on Ubers and takeaway. She and Gordon have made a conscious effort to keep their kids "hungry, determined, passionate and normal," he says. "They've got to understand it's not just on a plate. I'm there for them but I can't do it for them."

That means the kids fly economy and have weekend jobs – and Jack's uni →



"I call it as it is. Some people find that offensive, but I get results."









Clockwise from left: Avid footballer Gordon takes part in a charity game in 2007; the Ramsays with Megan, Jack and Holly; embracing fatherhood again with Oscar in Cornwall; Megan, Matilda, Holly and Jack with Gordon and Tana.

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accommodation is no bigger than a prison cell. "He'll make a bolognese and put it into little freezer compartments," says Gordon.

The kids could all cook well by the age of 10, thanks to their mother's focus on self-sufficiency, but none of them has any intention of following their father into a professional kitchen. Jack does, however, sell his coveted dishes to classmates. "He can cook brilliantly but he has no interest," says Gordon. "He's like, 'F*ck no, I want a proper job'."

When talk turns to baby Oscar, Gordon goes to water, hunting for the latest video on his phone: "He FaceTimed me this morning – he's got these beautiful little teeth at the front, two at the back. When I shout 'zoom zoom' he lights up and starts slapping his hands on his little chair."

Gordon gets shirty when people mistake him for Oscar's grandfather, but he stands by his decision to go back into the baby vortex in his 50s: "Everyone says, 'You're mad', and it's like, 'F*ck off! What's it got to do with you?'"

Number five was no accident. The Ramsays, who had their first three children via IVF, lost a baby boy in 2016 when Tana was just under six months pregnant. "It was devastating," says Gordon. "Experiencing that loss, we were tight anyway, but it brings the whole family tighter."

He was relieved to have another boy – "because three girls, as beautiful as they are, are f*cking hard work". To illustrate the day-to-day dramas of living with daughters, he recounts how Holly dyed her hair pink last year and enlisted him to break the news to a furious Tana. Holly then posted a picture on social media and was crushed by the negative feedback: "I said, 'They're not your friends – they're called strangers!' Anyway, the next day she dyed it back black."

With Oscar he plans to spend more time enjoying the baby years, but that doesn't include mopping up number twos. He copped a lot of flak years ago when he said he didn't change nappies, but remains unrepentant. His excuse is incompetence – and repulsion. "I'm shit at changing nappies," he says. "It's the smell. I suppose if I was a gardener I could do that pureed guacamole easily, but as a chef? No. Tana's brilliant at it."

"I sometimes think if I were to stop working I'd stop existing."



Gordon and new judges Andy Allen, Melissa Leong and Jock Zonfrillo.

At home the division of labour seems drawn down traditional gender lines, with Tana ruling the domestic realm – a system he says works for them. "We just stick to what we're good at doing," says Gordon, who met Tana when she was dating a chef friend and married her in 1996 when she was 22. "There's a movement now that you've got to share everything, but I think it's down to you two. It's nobody else's business."

Now 45, Tana has authored several cookbooks and it's her food the kids prefer. The shiny marital picture was tarnished, though, in 2008 when a woman, Sarah Symonds, claimed she'd had a seven-year affair with Gordon; he denied it and Tana remained silent. The following year, his family-man image took another hit when he insinuated that *A Current Affair*'s Tracy Grimshaw was a lesbian and compared her to a pig. Tracy labelled him an "arrogant narcissist" and a bully, and he was forced to apologise. It was more bad news three years ago when Tana's father – Gordon's former business partner, Chris Hutcheson – was jailed for six months for hacking Gordon's email account – after Gordon accused Hutcheson of embezzling more than $2 million.

Yet Gordon continues to bounce back. Wearing a snug black T-shirt and trainers, the ultra-marathon runner is a fit 53, even if those entrenched frown lines spanning his forehead are the defining feature of his face. When Gordon meets with *The Weekly*, he has already spent a week in Tasmania, shooting the second season of *Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted*, a National Geographic food series, and is set to film back-to-back in Malaysia, Singapore and India over the following two weeks. After a week's break in London, it's back to LA.

He has always identified as a grafter. "I just keep going, moving as far away as possible from where I began," he wrote in his autobiography, *Humble Pie*. "I sometimes think that if I were to stop working, I'd stop existing."

These days, however, he tries to take three months off a year. Over Christmas the family spent three weeks together – at their spectacular new home in Cornwall and on holiday in the Maldives – and Oscar only made it more special. Tana is gunning for another baby, but Gordon isn't so sure (which is a polite paraphrasing of "F*ck that!").

Still, he says he's savouring every second of new parenthood. He is especially delighted that his little boy is showing signs of his dad's culinary discernment. "He has started throwing his food back – so there's a palate there," says Gordon. "And he's already got that first wrinkle in his forehead, which is great news." **AWW**

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