



# Force of will to succeed

Eddie Izzard has a country-hopping tour, movie roles, politics and a family on the go, writes **Andrew Fenton**

**E**DDIE Izzard might just be the most motivated comedian in history. He's almost two years into his *Force Majeure* world tour, the most extensive ever (not the longest, or the most tickets sold, he clarifies, but the most countries: 26), and in June he performed three hour-long comedy shows back to back in English, French and German to commemorate the 70th anniversary of D-day.

Not content to rest there, he says that Russian, Spanish and Arabic are next. All he has to do now is memorise 45 minutes more of his set in Spanish, and learn how to speak Russian and Arabic.

Izzard is almost as well known for running 43 marathons in 51 days for Sport Relief as he is for being an "executive transvestite", an identity that's still dear to him, even if he's putting it on the backburner for "strategic reasons".

Having conquered comedy and come at least to some sort of an accommodation with Hollywood, the 52-year-old now has his sights firmly set on politics, following in the footsteps of other well-known alternative-comedian transvestites turned politician such as ... erm.

It's no vague aspiration, however. Izzard's been laying the groundwork since 2011 and has narrowed it down to the year and month: May 2020, when there's a general election and a London mayoral race.

UK voters hoping Izzard will liven up politics may initially be disappointed.

"I don't mind looking very serious when I'm doing politics," he says. "I think I can afford to be more light-hearted or off the cuff once I've really got my feet under the table, when I feel I'm doing something positive."

He does expect to be laughed at, though, to begin with. Part of the secret of his success is he just doesn't care.

"I can go through the embarrassment point," he explains. "(I have) the ability to take ridicule and go through that until people are going, 'well, it's OK, it's not too bad ...'"

That's how he endured the jibes of onlookers in Covent Garden when he was an "awful street performer", how he ploughed on through not-very-good, early stand-up gigs, and how he toughed out what he feared could potentially be a career-ending decision to come out as a transvestite.

His never-give-up mentality was also the reason he was able to run all those marathons.

"I didn't actually necessarily get good (at running), I just kept going," he says.

But what is it that drives him on and on, when he's already achieved so much? It seems to be the very same thing that attracted him to comedy in the first place, which Izzard traces back to the death of his mother in 1968 when he was just six.

"I think that's why I swapped the affection I got from her, to an audience's affection," he says. "Maybe it's that thing that is driving me ... the audience seemed to go 'hey, you're doing good', and I thought, 'I'd like that, please'."

In person Izzard is more reserved and serious than fans might expect, although he does warm up as the conversation progresses.

Dressed in a sports jacket over a black T-shirt, with short hair and a neatly trimmed beard, the only nods towards his transvestism are long red painted nails (a Union Jack on his ring finger), a bracelet and a diamond earring.

Sticking with "boy mode" at present is a calculated decision. He's been chasing better parts in Hollywood.

**Someone said, 'you're not allowed to be strategic', and I said it's my life, my body, my sexuality**

"You just apply the logic," he says. "To someone who's a bean counter who says, 'We want this to sell to Iowa, should we get that transvestite guy for the role, or this guy who's not a transvestite?' How many transvestites have already come out and got really good roles? Zero."

Well, there's at least one. Izzard has been one of the world's best known transvestites for two decades and in that time landed parts in films including *Velvet Goldmine*, *Ocean's 13* and *Mystery Men*. But he believes the emphasis on boy mode led to roles in *United States Of Tara* and *Hannibal*, the upcoming feature *Boychoir* with Dustin Hoffman, and as a supervillain in the PlayStation Network's *Powers*.

"I had this vague internet fight with someone who said, 'you're not allowed to be strategic', and I said it's my life, my body, my sexuality," he says. "I have the right to choose because I've decided I have the right to choose."

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