

'Getting on the ladder young set me up'

EX-GLADIATOR HUNTER DEMONSTRATED BRAINS AS WELL AS BRAWN WHEN HE BOUGHT A HOUSE AT 20

WHILE Joe Wicks has been keeping the nation's kids fit during lockdown, former Gladiator James Crossley is fighting to get the over-forties back in shape. These days his weapon of choice is the yoga mat.

James, 47, joined the hit TV show *Gladiators* in 1993 as muscle-bound, floppy-haired Hunter and became its youngest warrior. He credits the programme for helping him on to the property ladder.

Gladiators was huge in the 1990s with 18 million viewers. How did you get that gig?

I started body building at 12 after binge-watching all the Rocky films. Then I went on to win Junior Mr Britain. The makers of *Gladiators* spotted me in a body-building magazine and asked me to audition. I was only 19 and gave up my job as a printer to become the youngest Gladiator on the show. I was quite wet behind the ears though, and had no idea that the older guys were padding out their rather revealing costumes!

How old were you when you bought your first house then?

I was 20. My dad was a bank manager and had instilled in me the importance of saving up and owning your own home. I was always a grafter and had three paper rounds as a kid - I didn't drink in my teens or spend money on clothes.

After I joined *Gladiators* I soon had the deposit for a house. In the 1990s deposits were only five per cent and banks were giving mortgages away. I feel sorry for young people today as there are not the same opportunities to get on the property ladder.

What was the house like?

It was a 1930s detached place with four bedrooms in Bilbrough, a quiet village just outside York where I grew up. It cost £120,000 and to this day was probably the best house I have ever owned. It was a family home and far too big for a bloke living on his own. But I was drawn to it because it had a double garage and my main priority was to get that fitted out as a gym. It also backed on to fields, which meant I could run as well as train twice a day when I wasn't filming.

Did it need much work?

I had a friend who was training to be an interior designer and she took it on as a project. The house was in good

nick but it needed some TLC and style stamping on to it. She made me take down my posters of The Hulk and Arnie Schwarzenegger in the living room, then rag-rolled every wall. It was her showcase and she made every room look amazing.

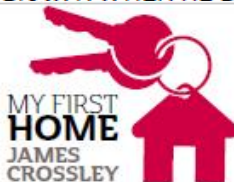
How did the neighbours feel about living next door to a Gladiator?

The house was in a secluded spot and I was so busy training and commuting to London for the shows that I didn't see my neighbours

much. But when I started going out with fellow Gladiator Jet, it sometimes caused a stir when people saw us walking around the town. We didn't get any aggro - it was a popular family show and people were just very friendly.

Did getting on the property ladder so young change your life?

Yes. I kept that house for four years and when I moved to London to be nearer to the show I sold it for four times what I paid for it. I bought another couple of houses, did them up and rented them out. I took courses in plumbing, tiling and plastering so I could be a hands-on landlord and do most of the work myself. It set me up



MY FIRST HOME
JAMES CROSSLEY

so when the show finished and the cheques stopped coming in, I had investments and I was financially stable.

What have you been up to since leaving Gladiators?

I retrained as an actor, joined the Royal Shakespeare Company and toured America. Eight years ago, as I was doing my 20th panto, I thought it was time to knock it on the head and get back into fitness. I started competing in Strong

Man and set up the Fit at 40+ Campaign doing workshops in fat loss and body-building.

How was your lockdown?

I didn't want to spend it vegetating in front of Netflix, so I trained to become a yoga teacher. Stretching and mobility is crucial when you are over 40. I know a lot of middle-aged people who can barely bend down to tie their shoelaces. As you get older your body changes, just like your eyesight, and yoga is pain-free movement that burns calories and increases flexibility, too. For me it's not about competing any more, it's about nourishing your body and mind and feeling good about yourself.

For details of James's fitness and yoga classes, see fitat40plus.co.uk

INTERVIEW BY CLARE MORRISROE



Flying start: James says his first home was the best property he's ever owned

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