

New *Top Gear* presenter Andrew, 40, lives in Manchester with his wife Rachael and children Holly, 14, Corey, 12, and Rocky, 10

Words by Gemma Calvert

Not a lot of people know this but I'm very good at...

chess. I played chess for Lancashire and my brother played for England against Wales. I started playing when I was six or seven when a teacher at my school in Preston got kids playing from all the estates and different backgrounds. I reached the pinnacle of my chess career at 11 but still play now and again with the kids. I reckon I've only got another six months or so of being able to beat them.

My best friend is... Paddy [McKeown, former Lancashire teammate]. He's a Scouser and a couple of years older than me. We started at Lancashire playing cricket at the same time. A lot of lads want to further their careers so it's quite a competitive environment and a lot of them – what they lacked on the cricket field – tried to overcompensate in the dressing room. If you showed any weakness or a chink in your armour, they'd be all over it. Me and Paddy stuck together and from then became best mates. We lived together for a long time, he was best man at my wedding and is godfather to one of my kids.

My nickname is... Fred. I had a rabbit called Fred, a tortoise called Fred and when I was 15 I played my first game for Lancashire's second team where the coach, John Stanworth, called me Fred and it stuck. There are much worse nicknames so I think I came off lightly.

The bravest thing I've ever done is... having kids. Holly arrived five weeks early when we were in a hotel in London after a game. I was a bit hungover and Rachael's waters broke so we jumped in a cab to a hospital. It was all pretty rushed. With children, you treat your firstborn like glass, then by the third you're braver and just let them crack on. Now I look at them and think, "How are you my kids?" I feel like I'm their mate rather than their dad.

My favourite TV show is...

Coronation Street. Growing up in northwest England, it's the one thing I've probably watched the most over the years, but I stopped watching it three or four years ago when it got a bit silly. Get Curly back in.

My perfect evening is... These days, a takeaway at home with family. I went to a few showy events but they weren't for me. I felt like a fish out of water. A lot of the stuff I used to do and the places I went to, I didn't like and I had to have a drink to get through it. Life's a lot simpler now I'm not drinking. If I've got my mates and my family, I'm happy.

I'd like to say sorry to... my mum and dad. When I got my MBE, I didn't take them to Buckingham Palace, which was a complete misjudgment on my part. I was embarrassed by it all, to be honest. It was after the 2005 Ashes and there was a lot of attention and awards coming our way. I'm proud I've got the MBE, but then you see other people doing great work and, essentially, we are doing our hobby.

The one thing I'd change about myself is... my right knee. I'd like a good one. I retired at 31 because of a knackered knee and there are certain things I can't do like running. But, in the grand scheme of things, it's not a big deal. Also I've got a big mole in between my eyes, which everyone takes the mickey out of, but I can live with that. A lot of things about me, whether it's mental health or physical shape, are far from perfect, but I don't know if I would change them. This is me – flaws and weaknesses.

The best thing my parents taught me was... My parents have got very strong values and the way I try and live has stemmed from them, especially parenting. As kids, my brother and I might not have been financially well off but in love and support we were rich.

The last time I cried was...

I welled up during the summer when my youngest boy scored his first 100 for Lancashire, playing an age group above. I was sat with my mum and dad and my grandpa, who's 90, and they all started welling up and it had a knock-on effect. I hid behind my sunglasses.

The first record I ever bought was... Dire Straits *Brothers In Arms* on tape. *Money For Nothing* – great song – sums up my career.

It's not good for my image but... I once got starstruck by Les Dennis. My kids used to go to a school in Cheshire with a lot of footballers' kids but the massive moment was when Les walked past me in the school yard.

My greatest weakness is... insecurity. I'm constantly doubting myself, but I think it's a good thing in some ways.

If I could pass any law, I would... I wouldn't get too technical on it. Just be nice. If everyone is nice, it helps a lot.

I drive... a Mercedes GLS. It's a seven-seater and gets everyone in. I've also got a Ferrari and a Lamborghini in the garage with a flat battery. I can't get it off the drive. The Lamborghini is more of an investment, to be honest. I've always loved cars, even as a young lad. We were so lucky at Lancashire because we got a really cheap lease deal with Rover, so as a 17 year old I was driving a Rover Coupe.

The most expensive thing I've ever splashed out on is... a house. We moved a few months ago from a leafy place called Prestbury in Cheshire and are now closer to Manchester. The house we had before was bigger and more expensive, this is more of a lifestyle choice. It's a completely different way of living. I can walk into town, to the gym and to get a coffee. I'm enjoying it.

In a film I would be played by... For my late teens and early twenties, you'd have to get

somebody like John Candy. Then, latterly, Sean Bean. He's from Yorkshire and always plays a northerner. I like Sean Bean, you know where you are with him.

The worst job I've ever done is... When I was 14 I worked at a shop at the top of my road in Preston called Pricewise. I worked for three hours lugging dog food in cans, putting them on shelves and sweating. The fella gave me my wages at the end of the night and I got £3.36. I didn't go back.

My perfect Sunday is... a lie-in and now the kids sometimes want to lie in so it's nice. Then it's all about a big Sunday roast. I'm always trusted with the meat, but not with the veg.

My favourite place in Britain is... Preston, my hometown. It's where I feel comfortable.

When I come off the motorway and see the "welcome to Preston" sign, I genuinely feel home.

My last holiday was... in the Maldives at the end of August. From last year until this summer, I've been nonstop and got the work-life and home-life balance a little bit wrong, so I had this summer off to watch the boys play cricket and spend time with my daughter.

I'm currently reading... my favourite book, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. I've probably read it five or six times.

If I had half an hour left on Earth, I'd... get something to eat. My last supper would be fish fingers, chips, beans and bread. It depends how old I am. If it was happening now, I'd be bothered. If it's further down the line, I'd think, "Well..." You've just got to make every moment count and do everything you want to do, so if you've only got that half an hour you can think, "I've had a good go at it, I can go." 🍷

Do You Know What? Life According To Freddie Flintoff (Blink, £18.99) is out now in hardback. See Express Bookshop on page 77.