

Super Saturdays? Get Me Out of Here



Perhaps it's something to do with my age. And the fact I'm a grandfather of four. Or a Hearts supporter. But lately my tolerance levels seem to be akin to a Fifa delegate's expense form claim – disappearing fast...

Regular readers of my rants – and I thank you both – will know I'm a reasonable sort of chap, not one who complains. As my wife will only too willingly tell you (isn't that right, dear?)

However, I have become rather more irritable than usual of late and it is partly down to the aforementioned Mrs Smith – or more specifically, her television viewing.

Marion is a fan of ITV. It's the channel she immediately goes to when she turns on the television. Or, to be more precise, STV. I'm old enough to remember STV when it was called Scottish Television. When I lived in Aberdeen in the 1970s and 80s the commercial television station was Grampian Television and you could watch the continuity announcer nattily dressed in his evening suit telling you what was coming on next. It was calm, collected and dignified.

It's all so much different now...

Part of my cunning Saturday night plan is to devolve ways of avoiding the sometimes inane drivel on STV (or as the announcer with an exceedingly annoying voice talking at a hundred miles an hour says 'STVEEEEEEE') With Hearts enjoying such a successful season this has, on occasion, meant enjoying a half pint lager shandy at a hostelry in Gorgie although this pastime can be fraught with danger (and what time do you call

this to be getting home? It's 9.00, dearest – what time do you make it?)

However, in recent weeks, I have been subjected to STV's self-proclaimed 'Super Saturdays'. This includes the delights of Ninja Warrior UK, Britain's Got Talent and Play to the Whistle. From around 7:00pm every Saturday evening millions of people will take leave of their senses, jettison their critical faculties and tune into three hours of what is mind-numbing awfulness on a scale not seen since Noel Edmond's House Party was forced on the nation by the BBC more than two decades ago.

This week, my feelings are akin to that of a condemned man as Britain's Got Talent is on STV for an hour and a half every night as the final beckons this Sunday. There seems no escape. The acts and the sometimes patronising comments of some of the judges, I can take. But the behaviour of the audience is something I find hugely irritating and makes me want to throw things at the telly. In each of the 'Super Saturday' programmes but particularly on Britain's Got Talent, is a relatively recent phenomenon and one that, like so many others, has derived from our American cousins – namely, noisy, screeching and wildly excitable audiences.

'Who are you and where are you from' asks the perennially smug Simon Cowell, *'I'm Jimmy from Birmingham'* replies a hapless contestant which invokes a huge *'Whooo-hoooo!'* from an audience who, I strongly suspect, have been given some kind of legally high substance in order they can react the way they do. That Jimmy gets a standing ovation merely for saying his name and where he comes from perhaps is a strong indication that Britain hasn't got much talent in the first place...

Mercifully, I have only caught fleeting glimpses of Britain's Got Talent but it seems to me to be a repetitive format that plays on the aspirations of susceptible no-hopers with limited talent and even less personality, acting out their fantasies

on stage with as much visual appeal as a sixteen-year-old greasy haired youth with severe acne. Like witnessing a car crash, many people appear drawn to this 'show' watching egotistic no-hopers 'living the dream' to use a modern day cliché. Talent shows on television are nothing new. In decades gone by there was Opportunity Knocks and New Faces. They could also be cringe-inducing but what marks Britain's Got Talent and its close relative The X Factor is this appears to be something of a freak show, a cynical marketing exercise masquerading as prime time television in order to manufacture publicity and generate income through gullible people phoning premium phone lines in order to make Simon Cowell and his half-naked torso bucketfuls of money.

The other programmes on STV on Saturday evening are little better. Ninja Warrior UK – the UK bit is apparently important – seems to me to be people leaping about for no apparent reason while hosts Ben Shephard and former footballer Chris 'Kammy' Kamara make inane comments. Meantime, another screaming audience hollers its 'encouragement'.

It's difficult to ascertain the point of Play to the Whistle. It's a quiz show, of sorts, but seems to be nothing more than a vehicle for ITV's current flavour of the month, comedian Bradley Walsh and footballer Frank Lampard to act foolishly for about half an hour. As well as screaming hoots of encouragement, the audience applauds anything that is said by Messrs Walsh and Lampard. The presence of Seann Walsh – apparently another comedian although I use the term loosely – and another footballer Jimmy Bullard rather lends itself to the question of the programme itself. Namely – what is the point? What little I watched of the shows this week seemed all so predictable and artificial – even the emotions are contrived. Yet throughout this week – and we're only at Wednesday – there were ceaseless comments about BGT from far too many people – some of whom should really know better – on social websites such as Facebook and Twitter. That said, I'm

not sure what saddens me more. That fact I watched Britain's Got Talent for all of five minutes before burying my head under a cushion – or the fact millions of people will be watching what passes for entertainment every night for the rest of the week.

Now I accept everyone has different tastes and I'm sure there will be many people who enjoy these programmes. They're not my cup of tea but each to one's own. But, for me, screeching, whooping audiences, immature former footballers and the limited ability of talent show contestants are not so much Super Saturday – more like Woeful Weekends...