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IS CAMERON ON THE RIGHT TRACK?

Despite points failure in the polls and Boris coming up fast, he's certain he's still ahead. Eleanor Mills shares a carriage with the PM

HOLLYWOOD MUSE

Kate Hudson, showbiz royalty, and her Brit rocker

RUNNING JOKER

Eddie Izzard tells Lynn Barber why he wants to be mayor

A photograph of David Cameron in a Rolls-Royce factory in Derby. He is seated in a yellow chair, wearing a dark suit and a purple tie, engaged in conversation with a woman whose back is to the camera. They are surrounded by a film crew, including a cameraman operating a professional video camera on a tripod, a boom operator holding a boom microphone over them, and several other crew members standing or kneeling. The setting is a large industrial hall with a high ceiling and a large blue roller shutter door in the background. Two massive jet engines are visible: one on the left with its fan exposed, and another on the right with the Rolls-Royce logo clearly visible on its casing. The floor is a light blue-grey color, and various cables and equipment are scattered on the ground. The overall atmosphere is that of a professional media production taking place in a high-tech industrial environment.

**DAVID
CAMERON**

The long shadows of Boris and the Baroness loom large over our encounter. The truth is that compared to either, our prime minister comes ➡

'I HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THE THATCHER LEGACY'

With Thatcher's shadow receding and that of Boris looming, the prime minister is on the ropes. The coalition is floundering, yet David Cameron still exudes supreme self-confidence at the dispatch box — and manages to take the kids swimming. As the PM campaigns for this week's local elections, **Eleanor Mills** pins him down. Photographs by **Simon Roberts**

up short in the popular imagination – and though he'd rather die than admit it, Cameron is intelligent enough to know it.

In his first-class seat, with his red box on the table, the PM seems taller and more Technicolor than he does on television. He exudes prosperity and good health. His shirt is bright white, his tie an appropriately mournful dark purple and his eyes piercingly blue-green against his navy suit.

Compared to his small, grey-suited advisers, he is a startlingly superior physical specimen: a silverback gorilla surrounded by inferiors. During our two days together I begin to suspect this dynamic is not an accident.

As I slide into the seat opposite him, he launches into a breezy tale about the lambs he rescued over Easter at a farm in his constituency that has a “lamb orphanage” — one has been called David Lamberon. Then he’s telling me about the “joys of Family Floatarama” at Chipping Norton swimming pool (“I can take all three of the kids and give Sam a morning off”) and how pleased he is that Sainsbury’s has opened in the town. Apparently he does the family shopping there, on his own, accompanied only by his police protection team.

In Westminster he has been basking in the success of the debate about Margaret Thatcher's legacy and fending off criticism of her £10m funeral. "It was important to give Mrs T a good send-off, we wouldn't want anyone to say it was undercooked."

Cameron says he isn't sure when he first met Thatcher. He thinks it might have been when he was around 16 and dropped into Downing Street to see his cousin, Ferdinand Mount, who was then running Thatcher's policy unit.

In his memoirs, Mount says he was taken by Cameron's precocious self-confidence andchutzpah. Cameron, by contrast, says he was "terrified" by Thatcher as a young researcher at Conservative Central Office (where he embodied that establishment phrase "start at the top and work upwards", by working there straight after university). He tells me he hadn't been there long when she swept into a Christmas party and mentioned that day's trade figures. He was "terrified" because he didn't know them — trade and industry was his brief.

Given their differences in age and political temperament, it's not a surprise that Cameron and Thatcher were not friends. In fact, he hadn't seen her in the last 18 months of her life. I ask him if he regards himself as a Thatcherite.



"I would say I was a big Thatcher supporter," he replies carefully. "I joined the party when she was in the ascendant."

What's the difference between a Thatcher supporter and a Thatcherite? He is momentarily flummoxed. "That's a good question," he says, playing for time. "There are lots of things she did which had my support and other things she did which needed to be changed; some of those things I like to think I have helped change."

I try again: are you a Thatcherite? "No," he concedes at last. "Other people might call me that. I think the label's now... it's slightly become... labels now don't quite mean what they did then."

Many of the 2010 Tory intake of MPs proudly call themselves Thatcherites, I say, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds, such as Priti Patel or Kwasi Kwarteng.

ARE YOU A THATCHERITE? 'NO. LABELS DON'T QUITE MEAN WHAT THEY DID THEN'

"Each to his own," he responds blithely. Call-me-Dave Conservatism was always a more fudgy, green-washed version of Tory thinking with a dash of gay marriage and Big Society thrown in. To his backbenchers it often seems a rag-bag of what he can get past Nick Clegg and the focus groups, often forged on the hoof in a crisis or after an interview with unforeseen ramifications. "I was a tremendous Thatcher supporter," he explains, "but there are now other challenges that need to be dealt with. I have problems with some of the Thatcher legacy — I've been more socially liberal."

Whatever spin he puts on it, the country remains firmly in the economic mire. The mind-boggling £121bn budget deficit is not shifting, the unemployment rate is up, pay rises are down and there is no sign of a retail recovery. Surely there is a case for a strong, Thatcheresque leadership? Cameron nods.

"The challenges we are facing today are equally mighty, if not bigger, than what she faced in terms of the turnaround and rebalancing the economy," he says, accepting the cup of coffee-flavoured hot water you are served in first class. "The resolve required is the same. But I'm trying to re-industrialise Britain," he stresses, implicitly conceding that Thatcher did the opposite.

"I'm a one-nation conservative, I try to take the whole nation with me and the whole notion

CLASH OF THE TITANS
David Cameron unveils a statue of Lady Thatcher in 2008.

'It was important to give Mrs T a good send-off,' he says, defending her £10m funeral. Right: with the other political heavyweight in his life, London mayor Boris Johnson, in 2011. Below left: a 'meet the people' roadshow at Eon's headquarters in Coventry. Below right: at Nunu nursery in Loughborough

of the Big Society is fantastically important, the thickening, the enriching of society..."
Aah, the Bisto PM.

“Thatcher was so focused on the economics,” he continues. “I want to take the best parts of her

economic renewal — engaging with the large private sector, backing small business and entrepreneurs, getting down tax rates on business and trying to combine that with a conservatism that is also about social renewal and communities.”

Yet Thatcher's populism sprang from her empathy with people who want to better themselves. That's a trajectory that, given his own background, Cameron is finding impossible to replicate. I hear his mantra about how he will kick-start the economy so often that his aides notice that I'm not scribbling



frantically enough. One of them leans over. "The PM's time is precious. In fact it's the most precious commodity he has," he chides me. "He needs to do some real work now, you have time in the diary tomorrow." It is motioned that I should leave his presence and take a seat further down the carriage.

When we arrive in Derby, I discover the prime minister runs on a different time plane from the rest of us. He tells me that he is “Germanic” about time efficiency. “I like meetings with a purpose, that begin and finish

**‘THE CHALLENGES
WE ARE FACING
TODAY ARE AS BIG,
IF NOT BIGGER,
THAN SHE FACED’**

on time,” he says. His day is choreographed to the minute. It begins at 5.45am in his kitchen where he goes through his red box, making decisions and writing notes.



An aide tells me cheerily that if she “pops something in the box” of an evening, “it’s always there, answered, the next morning”.

Cameron explains that some civil servants still suffer

night sweats over Gordon Brown's chaotically messy desk with its teetering piles of unmade decisions. I can't help wondering if the busy-bee shtick is intended to counteract the suggestions that Cameron — unlike Thatcher — is actually a nine-to-five, a bit too keen on “chillaxing” and those idle sessions of the computer game Fruit Ninja.

He confesses that his current “guilty pleasure” is the music-streaming service, Spotify. The difference, I suppose, is that you can listen to music while working. Our first stop in Derby is the Rolls-Royce factory and academy just outside the city — a mighty industrial campus of roundabouts and steel-roofed hangars. Cameron is intrigued by a full-scale Lego model of a jet engine, and chats to the bosses and apprentices about their careers. As we wander around the factory — all sparkling shiny floors and similarly scrubbed-up workers — Cameron’s aides tell me how important such visits are and that I’d be “amazed” by how much of what the PM ➤➤➤→

The prime minister in his private office at No 10

If he is to survive, he will need to build a coalition among all the voters. “I’ve never thought of politics as targeting a whole load of demographics and getting them to stack up, my mind doesn’t work like that.” Perhaps it should — Barack Obama’s targeting of specific sections of the vote paid off in America, a lesson not lost on Ed Miliband, with his “35% strategy” for winning the next election.

What does he make of the 40 or so of his own backbenchers who are said to loathe him? “I keep reading about this but when I’m sitting in the tea room — and I am one of the first prime ministers in a generation who, when he’s finished doing PMQs, goes to the House of Commons dining room and has lunch and listens to everybody — I don’t feel hostility, there’s lots of banter and fun, I feel warmth and friendship. Generally speaking, it’s pretty good.” But he’s the most powerful man in the country; who is going to be hostile to his face?

Would Theresa May be a good bet?
(I'll come to Boris Johnson later).

"I'm surrounded by talented people... there are so many people coming through, where people can go, 'look at that rising star,'" he says evasively.

Throughout the day, several different aides tell me proudly how good Cameron is “at shifting gears” — how being prime minister means entertaining (pause for breath) Cilla Black at a party, then chairing a challenging meeting on national security, popping to the Commons, coming back to work at a speech, then home to Sam and the kids.

I see what they mean about changing gears. I suddenly visualise him as a robot with four modes: 1. TV mode. 2. Public speaking. 3. Chummy to his aides. 4. Dispatch box. Adding to this cyborg persona is his almost artificially smooth, sleek skin — so peachy that he could be wearing foundation, though ►►►►►

I compare this soggy sycophancy with the rigour of Tony Blair's inner circle, in which polling adviser Philip Gould would regularly explain to the PM exactly why the public hated him and what he was doing wrong, while Anji Hunter and Alastair Campbell saw it as their duty to tether Blair to Earth. I detect no such appetite for bracing appraisal from Cameron. It reminds me of a story that did the rounds at White's, the gentleman's club where Cameron's father was chairman. "No one's been able to tell David anything since he was eight," Cameron Sr reputedly said when his son became PM. Another well-placed observer confirmed that "Cameron won't listen to advice. He surrounds himself with second-raters."

With Steve Hilton, his friend and former blue-sky thinker, in San Francisco and former media enforcer Andy Coulson facing criminal charges, is there anybody in his entourage who dares speak truth to power?

His advisers are pleasant enough, but many are young and timid. His silverback status makes him the uber-male, taller by a head, incontestably the boss. This is reinforced by his body language. He stands legs akimbo, feet powerfully planted, crotch thrust forward, and waving his hands. There is no question he is a skilled communicator. At the headquarters of the energy company Eon in Coventry, he effortlessly handles a 500-strong throng of

workers. He is well briefed and smoothly plausible. But as he blithely trots out his catechism yet again — “deficit down by a third, we’ve created 1.2m private-sector jobs, we’ll make sure you’ll always be better off in work than out of it, the devil will make work for idle hands” — the lady beside me is raising her eyebrows, shaking her head and muttering criticism. Her colleagues are also looking sceptical. Another starts tutting. Cameron is energetic and plausible, but he lacks the

HE CONFESSES HIS NEW GUILTY PLEASURE IS THE MUSIC-STREAMING SERVICE SPOTIFY

political magnetism of a Bill Clinton, or the resolute sense of purpose generated by Winston Churchill or Thatcher.

For all his fluency, he doesn't connect. Thatcher, I say during our interview, had that inherent appeal to the upwardly mobile in her personal narrative, which started as the daughter of a grocer from Grantham.

"Ummmm... I've always believed that what matters much more is what you are doing, what is your motivation, what are you trying to achieve? Where are you going, not where you are from. You saw me out and about with the apprentices, I don't find it a barrier." He is often criticised for leading a cabinet of millionaires — pale males who largely went to public

I don't think he is. There's definitely a whiff of the ham actor, or Barbie's boyfriend, Ken, about him. Cameron is a polished performer, but perhaps we might warm to him more if he made the odd Boris-style howler.

After Loughborough, we head to Coventry station and home. Cameron is pleased with himself, expansive. It's as if he's been surfing a mighty wave all day and has got to the shore, unscathed. The tension dissolves.

More telling, however, is a little to and fro with his civil servant: "Did I get all my facts right?" he asks, bullishly. "Yes prime minister, just as you always do," he responds sycophantically.

The next day I arrive in Downing Street for a more formal sit-down interview. At 10am sharp we are ushered down a long corridor into his private office. "Take the chancellor's chair," he says, guiding me to one of two high-backed red and cream chairs. He takes the other and talks me through his mantelpiece: a memento from Camp David, a china drinking horn from Medvedev, a sausage-shaped silver mirror from the G8 in Maryland. He is proudest, though, of a picture by his eldest daughter Nancy, 9, of the Mona Lisa (which appears to be a portrait of Samantha).

There are grey hairs now, particularly around the nape of his neck, and he says, "I've never worked so hard in my life. I feel the responsibility more than I ever have done, I feel more passionate and I have more worries than I've ever had in my life, but I don't think I am a changed person." So how does he relax — Tony Blair wrote in his memoirs about hitting the bottle of an evening — does Cameron like a tippie? "No, I don't do that. I like a glass of wine, but not every night, it's important not to do that, though I like a glass of wine with dinner and a pint in the pub..."

"I like to get out, go for a run, you do feel a bit like a caged animal sometimes. Running round the park clears the head, I'm a great believer in fresh air and exercise, I love going for long walks at the weekend. Fresh air, cycling with the kids. I'm a very outdoors person. That said," he laughs, "our walks with the kids often end up in a pub." When was he last drunk? "Not for a long time," he says a little ruefully. What, not



BOXED IN
Travelling first class to Derby from London, on his way to the Rolls-Royce factory

I can just nip up for a hug," he says tenderly. "She is often a bit confused when I disappear again because she's not quite sure where I go. She was in the garden [right outside his office] with friends

'I HAVE MORE WORRIES THAN I'VE EVER HAD IN MY LIFE. RUNNING CLEARS THE HEAD'

since the Buller (he was famously a member of the Oxford drinking club, The Bullingdon)? There is a nervous laugh. "Not even at Christmas."

I ask whether he is still a hands-on husband, especially as Samantha works two days a week. He laughs shiftily. "The deal is not quite what it used to be, though I did cook last night: steak and baked potatoes — that sounds rather unhealthy, but there were some French beans and courgettes involved, I promise. We do try and make sure we have time for each other, but nothing is sacrosanct, anything can suddenly come up and it takes priority. The phone is always ringing, there are always calls to make. I'm frequently in the car on the phone to the Israeli prime minister telling the kids in the back to shut up. There's a lot of that, this job is exceptionally demanding and you have to make yourself available at the drop of a hat."

His staff tell me that Florence, 2, often wanders into the press office or private office in her pyjamas with her bottle to see daddy. "Florence has never known any other home, she does sort of wander about not knowing which is home and which is office, it does all meld together, though we try to keep the flat separate, that is home, it's where homework takes place. I do nip up a bit, because you can and with Florence it's very spoiling because

yesterday and looked in through the window and was slightly baffled to see me there. She's always asking 'whose house?' or 'whose car?', because she gets confused going about in different police cars, but she'll work it out."

The spin doctor says we've only got a minute left, so I remind him that when I was late for the train the day before, he said: "Blame Boris". "Did I?" he laughs. "I meant Bob Crow." Is Boris a thorn in his side? "Boris is one of the greatest assets that the Conservative party has," he says to my surprise. "That's why I emptied campaign teams round the country to help him win."

But does he not feel threatened by Boris's easy charm and popularity (he outscores Cameron in some opinion polls and is widely tipped as the next leader)? "No, I love Boris." Would he be a good prime minister? "He'd be a..." he stops. "It's not up to me to pick the next leader of the Conservative party, or the one after that, but I'd never want to put a limit on Boris, I encourage him. Boris can do anything." Surely Boris has been the man Cameron had to beat, ever since they were at school together. "This is one of the great myths of politics," says the PM. "These things grow up and it's so long ago no one challenges them, but I don't think we really knew each other at school, he was a couple of years ahead of me. He was very clever."

Then Cameron explodes into a beaming grin. "But," he says exultantly. "Boris didn't get a First! I only discovered that on the Panorama programme the other night... I didn't know that." He is suddenly lit up, almost punching the air with joy.

And in that outburst of public-schoolboy competitiveness — Cameron of course, did get a First — he reveals everything we've always thought about him ■



A week in the life of David Cameron — exclusive behind the scenes images: thesundaytimes.co.uk/davidcameron