

# Radio ga ga

A new police radio slot in Ipswich is giving listeners something slightly different - horns, toy monkeys and the 'human' side of police officers.

Syreeta Lund reports

You know you are not meeting your average Joe when sergeant Neil Boast bounds up grinning from ear to ear like a Yorkshire Terrier that's been given the go-ahead to bark for a whole hour without being told to be quiet. He is very excited about his radio show. It's just the sixth one broadcast on Norwich Community Radio; it's called *Cop That* and regularly features an interview with a guest that usually has a direct but sometimes vaguer connection with policing.

What does Suffolk Constabulary gain from the show? Sgt Boast says he didn't want it to be just another police radio slot where they would recount the crimes in Ipswich for that week. "I like to push the boundaries a bit. I want people to think of police officers as normal people, that have the same hopes, fears and expectations and that they have a sense of humour."

The show came about after Suffolk chief constable Simon Ash visited ICR, the community radio station, and management said they were looking for a police officer to do a show there - Sgt Boast was given the 'presenter test' by being shown a poster and asked to name an array of various singers and bands before undergoing some Ofcom training and subsequently being let loose on the mike.

The community radio station has around 15,000 listeners across their stations and *Cop That* goes out to a non-police audience so Sgt Boast is keen to keep it interesting.

When you think of a radio show based in East Anglia, Alan Partridge's *Knowing Me, Knowing You* may come to mind. Working the graveyard slot, Steve Coogan's comical character was known for his entertaining gaffs with guests, such as when Simon Fisher, a nine-year-old prodigy came on the show being particularly obnoxious and Alan was compelled to ask his father, "When did you first realise that Simon was abnormal."

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Thankfully, Sgt Neil Boast does not follow in his footsteps as during the course of his hour-slot he interviews his boss, Supt Alan Caton so there is no room for gaffs, although Sgt Boast does not shy away from the

unconventional; during the show he produces a 'horn' when his guest makes a double entendre and a screaming toy monkey when there is too much police jargon.

But the radio show is a real mix of the humorous and serious; discussing issues which impact on the community.

So far he has had a variety of guests on the show, including a local woman raising money for refugees, a controversial subject in the area among some residents.

"I asked legitimate questions like had she struggled to promote the gig and we talked about how people struggled to differentiate between refugees and economic migrants," Sgt Boast says.

But this week it's Supt Caton's turn to be interviewed. Sgt Boast says in their younger days they used to patrol together in Woodbridge, a town in Suffolk, adding that they were like 'Starsky and Hutch' from the 1970s series. "I was Hutch, he was the blonde and slightly better looking one."

All guests are asked to bring in their school reports and a list of tracks they associate with different moments in their lives. Sgt Boast starts his interview on a light note and Supt Caton picks his first track from the 1960s; *These Boots are Made for Walkin'* by Nancy Sinatra.

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Photography: BBC (Moral Rights asserted).



Comedy character: Steve Coogan's alter ego radio host Alan Partridge



Sgt Boast and his 'screaming monkey'

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But they also tackle heavier police-related issues, jumping from the subject of great British dishes to the Ipswich murders where five sex workers were brutally killed. Supt Caton was district commander during the dramatic events that unfurled. “My role was to respond to the reports of the vulnerable young people that went missing.”

He says their aim was to get the women off the streets as they were particularly vulnerable, working with them through different agencies, such as the health service, housing and

probation, while also targeting the men who used them.

Sgt Boast brings in the topical debate of Jeremy Clarkson’s fairly predictable faux pas as presenter of *Top Gear*, when he linked lorry drivers to murdering prostitutes, the officer says that his father was a lorry driver before Supt Caton agreed the comments had been ‘ill informed’.

During the show listeners are invited to call in and email, although they filter the questions before answering as they don’t want any offensive comments aired in public. Sgt Boast said they have had people as far away as Australia and New Zealand emailing in because they can listen on line.

He opens an email from a listener who says that her 15-year-old son is thinking of joining the police when he leaves school, asking is it still a good career and tips for joining.

Supt Caton says he has enjoyed ‘every single moment’ of his police career and that they need to continue the good work they do with the community. But he also talks about the changes in policing and when Sgt Boast declares he will never wear a peaked cap, Supt Caton says that lots of things have changed and that he ‘used to walk round with a piece of wood in his pocket’ (meaning a truncheon) at which point Sgt Boast

pulls out a horn and sounds it.

Back onto Supt Caton’s ‘back tracks’ and we move through to him growing up in the 1970s, as *Jet by Wings* is played, reminding him of his years spent on the terraces at Ipswich Football Club.

Another music track some of his colleagues may or not be surprised by, out of some misguided belief they may not be ‘human’, is *Ladies Night* by Kool and the Gang which he says reminds him of a nightclub in the town during the 1980s ‘when he was a single lad’. He quickly redeems himself with his wife, Julie, by adding the track *On My Own* by Michael McDonald and Patti Labelle, his wedding song from 1986.

Supt Caton’s school report from 1977 is also given a public airing, Sgt Boast reads: ‘Alan shows a very mature approach towards his work but there are moments he could work harder’. The radio show host also reads a section from his own school report declaring he missed ‘double lessons’ which have put him back in typing class and that he had an unfounded belief that school was not open on Fridays as he never seemed to turn up.

And Sgt Boast brings an element of his real life into the show, and as well as controversial and more serious issues he likes to keep things light-hearted. He often talks about events of his past week, such as the time he walked into a sex shop “by accident” in Brighton. “I thought it was a record shop,” he says and describes how he walked in with his wife in toe and it suddenly dawned on him that the latex object he had picked up wasn’t a device for clearing the sink.

The radio show is definitely something a bit different; it provides an eclectic mix of music, banter and a good helping of slightly more subtle public relations for the force. *Cop That* touches on serious issues which local people can associate with while also revealing the more ‘human’ side of police officers, as Partridge might say: “When did you first realise police officers could be normal?”