

A man of his time: Hugh Jackman, wearing a Montblanc Meisterstück Heritage Moonphase in red gold.

Plenty more Mr. Nice Guy

Expansively charismatic on-screen, serene and debonair off it, Hugh Jackman exudes gentlemanly elegance with effortless aplomb – no wonder he’s been welcomed into the family of Montblanc, whose timepieces he wears on the ensuing pages. nick scott finds the nicest guy in Hollywood living up to his reputation.



Both here and overleaf, Hugh wears a Montblanc Timewalker Extreme Chronograph DLC.

The first time I met Hugh Jackman, he appeared from nowhere in a milky void, like a doomed Arctic explorer's chimerical rescuer. This was back in 2008, in the Sydney offices of his now-disbanded film company Seed Productions. Having buzzed my way in, I stepped over blanched floorboards into a room whose white-washed walls camouflaged the achromatic sofas and beanbags strewn about the place, as well as the pearly ornaments — plaster busts of Eastern philosophers and the like — lining the shelves. It was like being inside a giant marshmallow.

Then, the sound of unhurried footsteps caused me to turn abruptly. An imposingly elegant, impossibly handsome six-foot-two-and-a-half figure, dressed in tailored but understated casualwear, had emerged through the daisy-petal soup. An outstretched hand clasped mine, and a thousand-watt smile bounced off the walls. "G'day, mate."

There was something strangely deifying about the whole encounter, which is apt given that Hugh Jackman is widely considered the most saintly man in Hollywood. The rumours of his cordiality and decency are legion: he's the guy who gives out lottery scratchcards to lowly film crew as a conversation opener; who has been blissfully married and monogamous for 18 years; who is a generous donor to causes ranging from the Global Poverty Project to Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS; who is more likely to burst into song than tears on set; who is happy to have a tarpaulin draped over a washing line instead of a trailer, as long as he can drive his son to school before shooting starts. He makes Tom Hanks, we're told, seem like a demonic, M&M's-bowl-smashing diva.

And when a Hollywood star's reputation doesn't so much precede him as surround him like a celestial glow, describing that celebrity as unequivocally modest, virtuous and grounded feels not only trite and hackneyed, but pitifully credulous, too — we're talking, after all, about a trained impersonator here. But spend a decent chunk of time with Hugh Jackman, and it's hard to avoid the conclusion that he is as permeable to life's more edifying ebbs and flows as he is impervious to the ego-distending undertows of fame. From the moment we met, he exuded warmth and humanity. Usually, when a high-

profile celebrity starts asking probing questions about the interviewer's life, it's an acquired technique akin to a tennis player pinning his opponent to the baseline: unidirectional tête-à-tête has a habit of putting the inquisitor on the front foot, media trainers believe, and should be avoided. In Jackman's case, though, it comes across as authentically affable interest in the affairs of a fellow human. And, if you'd prefer to hear it from someone who's spent weeks and months with the 45-year-old star, how about this from Shawn Levy, who directed Jackman in the robot-boxing film *Real Steel*: "It's not an act," he says. "There's no on-off switch. He is an open, gracious, generous human being all the time."

In the six years that have passed since that initial meeting, Jackman has hosted the 2009 Academy Awards, been nominated for the Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of long-suffering convict Jean Valjean in the 2012 film adaptation of *Les Misérables* and picked up a Golden Globe for the same movie. He has also become a global ambassador for fine Swiss watchmakers Montblanc. His star has risen astronomically, and yet, when *The Rake* encounters him this time around, he's as chummy, as affable, as ever before. Sure, he gives the impression that while he could, at the drop of a clapperboard, unleash the more domineering, lens-wooing kind of charisma that one would expect of a film star — but it seems he'd rather let that simmer under the surface while off camera. Any more Zen and his blood might start flowing in the opposite direction.

One of the reasons for Jackman's unshakeable equanimity, he says, is his granite-solid marriage to actor, director and producer Deborra-Lee Furness, whom he describes as "the backbone of my life". On the fourth finger of his left hand, a self-designed wedding band is etched with a Sanskrit phrase, "*Om paramar mainamar*" ("We dedicate our union to a greater source"). Another factor underlying his aura of serenity, he says, is transcendental meditation: "I practise at least once a day," he tells *The Rake*. "It centres me. When I'm done, I feel like I've come up from underwater. It's hard to explain, but it's like you've recharged your batteries and are ready to start the day — I come back to whatever job I'm doing a new man."

“NOT MANY ACTORS CAN PICK UP A NICOLE KIDMAN, THROW HER ON THE BED AND RAVISH HER WITH BELIEVABILITY”

— BAZ LUHRMANN

Now, if you think that transcendental meditation is Frappuccino spiritualism for hemp-wearing New Agey types, rather than dashing virile actors who turn down the chance to play James Bond, as Jackman did pre-*Casino Royale* (“I thought it would box me in too much”), consider this: Clint Eastwood does it. So do Rupert Murdoch and David Lynch. Case closed. Jackman is emphatic that the technique, established in India by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the 1950s, has boosted both his professional competence and general world-view. “In my private life, I steer towards an understanding of the truth,” he says. “There is a continuity that is always there. A home or a base — that’s what meditation is to me. It’s a way to remind me of myself, and that all of these things — whether I’m an interviewee or a husband or an actor or whatever — they’re all just roles. So, the size of any given life event is ultimately irrelevant.”

Born to English parents in Sydney in 1968, Jackman is loquacious when it comes to the subject of his father, who raised him and his four siblings single-handedly from the age of eight. “He’s my hero,” he says. “I carry him with me wherever I go. Everything he taught me, from riding a bike to instilling in me the value of hard work and dedication, has made me the man I am today. Sometimes, when I’m talking to my kids about something in their day, about a teacher or a friend, something good or bad, I realise that I sound just like him, and it makes me smile.”

During his senior year pursuing a communications degree at the University of Technology, Sydney, Jackman was bitten by the acting bug, and enrolled in the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts where, he says, he was the “dunce of the class”. It wasn’t until he was 26, having held down jobs as a petrol-station attendant, party clown and PE teacher, that he got his first acting gig on the poorly received Australian TV show *Correlli*. To this day, he toasts the fact that his first taste of fame and success came relatively late: “Up until then I would have been [affects dumb-frat-boy tone], ‘Duh, wow, here’s some money and some chicks...’”

It was on the set of *Correlli* that Jackman met Furness, with whom he now has two children, adopted following a series of miscarriages and failed IVF programmes (Furness is the founder and patron of Australia’s National Adoption Awareness Week, and the couple had always planned to adopt, regardless of whether success came via the biological route). They’ve been together, and ardently happy, since 1996 — which seems to have roused sectors of the media into a kind of infuriated, ultimately doomed quest to find some flaws in their domestic bliss. When Australian prime-time chat-show host Andrew Denton tried to eke some criticism of her husband out of Furness, all she could come up with was that he is woefully lame at DIY. “She wishes I was more than an asshole,” Jackman recently joked.





Hugh Jackman's impressive versatility as an actor has seen him convince as (clockwise from left) a long-suffering convict in *Les Misérables*, a washed-up, robot-hustling former boxer in *Real Steel*, a jealousy-ravaged magician in *The Prestige*, a vampire-slayer in *Van Helsing* and a mutant antihero in the *X-Men* franchise.



Inept with a hand drill he may be, but Jackman is undeniably nifty when it comes to the tools of his trade — in particular, the one widely considered to be the most powerful in an actor's arsenal: imagination. He's a genre-hopping master of his craft, as comfortable starring in blockbuster comic-book adaptations as he is in gritty naturalism. In the last decade alone, he's played an intrepid vampire-slayer (*Van Helsing*, 2004), a charming but homicidal English aristocrat (*Scoop*, 2006), a jealousy-ravaged magician (*The Prestige*, 2006), a two-bit hustler (*Deception*, 2008), a Mandarin-fluent crooner (*Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, 2011), a used-car salesman-cum-food-sculpture saboteur (*Butter*, 2011), a washed-up, robot-hustling former boxer (*Real Steel*, 2011 — Sugar Ray Leonard helped him train for that one), the aforementioned Victor Hugo protagonist in *Les Misérables* and an unhinged vigilante in last year's *Prisoners*.



In between all this, he's starred in five instalments of the *X-Men* franchise, and effectively played two roles in 2008's *Australia* — halfway through which he mutates from rugged cattle drover to debonair, white-tuxedo'd charmer — and three in 2006's *The Fountain*, in which he channels a 16th-century Spanish conquistador, a present-day simian-tinkering oncologist and a 26th-century astronaut. Add to that the planning of his next major film project — *The Greatest Showman on Earth*, in which he'll play legendary American



As the host of the 81st Academy Awards in 2009, Hugh Jackman showed off his vocal talents, nimble dancing feet and all-around superb showmanship in his opening routine, which included a segment with Anne Hathaway, and then again in his performance with Beyoncé Knowles.

impresario PT Barnum ("I can't wait to sink my teeth into the role and make it my own," he tells *The Rake*) — and his voice being lent to cartoon mice, penguins and boomerang-wielding Easter bunnies, and you have a decade of prolific diversity surely unmatched by any of his Hollywood peers.

As well as his versatility, directors are drawn to Jackman for his sheer chutzpah in front of camera. As Baz Luhrmann, who directed him in *Australia*, put it: "There are not many actors who have an ability to pick up a Nicole Kidman, throw her on the bed and ravish her with believability," before adding, "He's also excellent with a cattle whip." Woody Allen, meanwhile, explaining why he chose Jackman to play a role opposite Scarlett Johansson in murder-thriller *Scoop*, likened him to Cary Grant, no less: "He's such a dapper, sweet, likeable guy who can dance and move gracefully, and is so handsome and can sing, that comparisons are inevitable."

Given his looks and the way in which elegant, masculine clothing hangs from his bulky frame — you don't get to play Wolverine without spending a decent amount of time at the gym — he could just as easily be a male model. Yet, he regularly proves himself devoid of narcissism by doing things like being 'fired' onto chat-show sets from circus cannons, appearing on *WWE Raw* or — far more seriously — posting photos of himself on his official Instagram account (@thehughjackman) with a plaster covering his nose after a round of successful skin-cancer treatment, in order to alert fans to the merits of taking precautions against the condition.

His capacity for self-deprecation — even when it comes to his stock-in-trade — seems endless. During that first meeting in Sydney, I asked him a rather impertinent question about

whether disbelief, however willingly suspended, might creep back into the minds of audiences seeing him play a hirsute, steel-knuckled mutant one minute, then a jazz-handing cabaret maven the next. He responded by cheerfully telling me about the only time he's corpsed on stage: "On the first night of *The Boy from Oz* in New York, I was about to do a male kiss scene when someone in the audience shouted, 'Don't do it, Wolverine!' The guy who was playing my boyfriend, Jarrod Emick, is a cowboy from South Dakota with a lot of facial growth, who smokes a pack of Marlboro a day — not ideal for my first-ever kiss on stage. Both of us were laughing and shaking, so I couldn't let go of him, and the audience could see what was going on, so they were laughing... It was impossible to stop."

Rather than being overwhelmed by his own meteoric rise, it seems to have had a calming effect on him. "I'm less nervous than I used to be," he says. "When my career started, I had a constant feeling like I was being dragged down the street by a Great Dane. I was like, 'Whoa, this is fun, but I have no control...'" Now, he says, he's able not just to weather the storm, but to ride it. It's apt that a man whose Aussie brogue shows no sign of succumbing to his international lifestyle describes his zest for life's challenges with a surfing analogy: "I love rising to the occasion — embracing the fact that this is not a ripple, not a two-foot wave, but a tidal wave," he says. "And when a tidal wave comes, what do you do? Duck under and hide from it, or get up, get on your board and go? Even if that wave crashes and I fall, I can enjoy that ride as well. Realising that the ride is more important than the result — that's the holy grail for me."

Hugh wears a Montblanc Meisterstück Heritage Moonphase in red gold.



Hugh Jackman with Montblanc CEO Jérôme Lambert at the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie in January. Bottom: Jackman is a huge fan of Montblanc's Meisterstück Heritage collection, which includes this Perpetual Calendar timepiece.



A TIMELY PARTNERSHIP

Hugh Jackman on his glitziest role to date: being Montblanc's new global brand ambassador.

As a young boy, Hugh Jackman used to look forward to his father getting home from his job as an accountant at PricewaterhouseCoopers and taking off his watch to do the washing up, so that the young Jackman could wear it. "I'd walk around the house in it, feeling really grown up," he recalls. So, it's appropriate that Jackman was unveiled as Montblanc's global brand ambassador during the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie earlier this year.

"The name Montblanc equals outstanding craftsmanship to me," he tells *The Rake*. "There's a reason the company has been around so long: while the products they make may have changed looks over the years, the quality has remained paramount to their mission. When such an iconic brand sends you an invitation to collaborate, you cannot really refuse."

Naming the Meisterstück Heritage as his favourite of Montblanc's timepiece range — "Both sexy and strong," he says — Jackman notes that it was the Swiss company's culture, as well as its craft, that drew him to the role. "I know it sounds clichéd, but Montblanc is a family," he says. "I have a very close group of people with whom I work every day of my life. We have all had such an excellent experience working with the Montblanc team at every level, from the craftsmen and -women to the creative team, to the executives."

Enquiries: www.montblanc.com

