Paul O’Grady
For the Love of Dogs (Series 4)
October 2015
PAUL O’GRADY FOR THE LOVE OF DOGS

EPISODE 1 PROGRAMME INFORMATION
TX Thursday 8th October 2015 at 8.30pm TBC
Embargoed until 00.01am on Tuesday 29th September 2015

Paul O’Grady returns to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home in this brand new eight-part award winning series to meet more of the canine residents who are looking for love, help, understanding and a new home.

During the series, Paul is on hand as one homeless pooch gives birth to a litter of pups and he rolls out the red carpet when Her Majesty The Queen visits Battersea to open the new kennel block. Paul also makes it his mission to find a new owner for Sidney the Staffie, inviting his mate, actor Tom Hardy to Battersea in the hope he can persuade him to take home a dog.

Despite some of the most hard-hitting stories yet, Paul continues to bring his unique blend of humour, fun, entertainment and comedy as he helps care for the canines: feeding them, walking them and holding their paws as they go for treatment. He learns about how they ended up in the home, at times moved to tears by their difficult and troubled stories, which don’t always guarantee a happy ending.

In episode one, Paul meets an elderly Labrador-cross called Hope, who has been left by her elderly owner, unable to take care of her any more. Hope is so distressed by her new surroundings at Battersea that she cowers in the kennels and is initially too scared to be filmed.

Battersea vet Claire explains: “It’s what we call shutdown, when they just aren’t interested in human interaction at all.”

The staff work hard to win Hope’s trust and build her confidence but a few days later she is still terrified and won’t eat. Paul is determined to cheer her up and despite showing little interest in his offer of a walk, he is overjoyed when he finally manages to get her to eat some dinner:
“Hope - I’m over the moon, over the moon. Two days she’s gone without food.”

With the goal of finding her a new home, the team at Battersea often team shy dogs with other more enthusiastic dogs to bring them out of their shell. Hope is taken to meet a Lurcher-cross called Billy but to Paul’s disappointment, she is not remotely interested in him.

Paul tries some home truths: “You can’t play hard to get at your age Hope. Quite frankly, you have to get what comes through the door. Us old ones, we can’t be fussy, those days are over.”

Can Hope overcome her shyness to find a forever home?

Also this week, Paul is rather taken by a Doberman-cross puppy found abandoned in Camden town, North London. Paul names her Nancy after her streetwise counterpart in ‘Oliver’ and she responds by promptly weeing on him. It’s clearly time for some training.

And a scruffy Yorkshire terrier, eight-year-old Titch, arrives at Battersea with such long dreadlocks that he struggles to move. Titch is swiftly taken to the barbers for some much needed pampering and after a good shave, he is much happier and half a kilo lighter, ready to search for a loving new owner…

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What do you think is the secret to the show’s enduring success, four series in?
“I’ve no idea! Honestly! It’s just me with dogs! Maybe it’s because you get a story. The dog comes in and it’s in an appalling state, and it’s just tragic, and then it gets a home. And so then you have a happy ending hopefully. But this series has been a difficult one because we’ve seen some dogs coming in in terrible states. I don’t go home at 5pm and forget about them, I go home and worry. And then I start the plotting... ‘Have I got room?’ But I’ve already got five dogs, four of them rescue dogs (two from Battersea), I can’t have any more! And mine are all ill. Two of them have got epilepsy, Olga’s got cancer, Louis has got arthritis and an ulcer on his eye. Then there’s Eddie, who thinks he’s Napoleon. But they’re great fun, I wouldn’t swap them for the world.”

Have you seen any changes at Battersea in terms of the background of the dogs?
“You see the worst of people and the best of people at Battersea. Often it’s the case that the owner dies and an old dog’s brought in, usually full of ailments due to it’s age. Then you get people whose homes have been repossessed and they’ve been put into rental accommodation and the landlords won’t let them have a dog. Then there are people who are working long hours now, who have to, so they can’t look after the dog. So it’s not just a case of wilful neglect, they’ve had their hand forced, so they’ve had to bring the dog in, and that’s really sad because they’re broken. It is heart breaking.”

Do you still get emotional when meeting some of the dogs and hearing their difficult stories?
“I’m terrible. Every day. People say to me, ‘What a lovely job, you go in and play with puppies’ but I do not! I go in and see some terrible things, we all do. It gets to us all, the crew as well. It’s very sobering when you are with these poor animals and you see what they’ve been through. But the staff do an incredible job down there.”

“I did find it a hard series to do, I was going in every day and there was another dog who was seriously ill or had been abused or was just terrified of being in kennels and it’s sad, it really is. There are some hard stories and sometimes there is just nothing that can be done and dogs do have to be put down, but it really is a last resort, everything is tried first. There are a lot of happy and funny moments too but there’s a few tears this series. But people do need to see that. It’s not Disneyland. You have to take the rough with the smooth otherwise it’s not fair to the viewer, if you don’t tell the truth. It shows what the staff go through on a daily basis too, because it’s so hard not to get involved.”

Did any particular dogs steal your heart this series?
“Oh, quite a few of them but thankfully they went – they got homes! There were two Spaniels called Lady and Gemma that needed medication for their ears which cost £50 a week but a woman came in and she said, ‘I don’t care what it costs, I’m taking them’. So there’s some great people out there and sometimes they do take the dogs that you think are never going to get a home.”

Have you found a new strategy to stay strong and avoid taking any more dogs home?
“I just say to myself, ‘Look you’ve got five, and they’re a handful, you can’t have any more’. I try to get friends to take them instead. People avoid me now, they say, ‘Ten minutes with him and you’ll have a dog’. A friend of mine took a beautiful little white Maltese, she’s gorgeous, she had been found roaming the streets. Another friend took one of the Labrador puppies and she’s lovely as well.”
We’ve heard you helped with the birth of a litter of puppies during filming?  
“The mum, a Yorkie called Flower, came in pregnant and she had a litter of three pups. But she rolled on one of them accidentally and crushed it quite badly internally, because they’re very delicate at that stage. There’s this tiny little puppy in a blanket and we were all willing it to live. I think they were Jack Russell pups. Jack Russells are responsible for everything! If a dog comes in pregnant, you can guarantee the father is a Jack Russell! Honestly, they are like the Errol Flynn’s of the canine world. They’re shocking. If they were lads they’d be in Marbella and they’d be on the programme on Channel 5 talking about girls and alcohol. That’s how I see them! They are lovely dogs but they’re real livewires.”

Tell us about the visit from Her Majesty coming up later in the series – did you coach the dogs on royal etiquette?  
“Yes! The Queen came! Funnily enough, I think it was the first time they’ve had a Corgi at Battersea and it was handed in a few days before she arrived, so we thought, we’ll show Beama the Corgi and we won’t say anything, we’ll just see what she thinks. But I said, she’s not going to take another Corgi, she’s got, how many? Three? Especially an old Corgi as it could go in there and they’ll fight. Anyway, she saw the Corgi and we had a chat about them. Then I saw her again later and she asked me what happened to the Corgi. She was genuinely interested. She is a dog lover. She was asking lots of questions. And thankfully the dogs were all good as gold.”

Any other personal highlights from filming?  
“We meet a dog called Pluto who had something wrong with his oesophagus so he couldn’t eat like a normal dog, so you had to get him to stand on his hind legs and make the food into balls and throw it down his throat so he could swallow it, because otherwise he wasn’t getting any nourishment because he’d just be sick. So there was a special box that the staff made for him to sit in, like a booth, so he puts his paws through like a baby and they feed him that way. He is a smashing dog. It’s amazing the lengths they go to keep a dog alive and keep it well. They won’t give up on them.”

“We went to see some veteran soldiers at the Royal Hospital Chelsea who had suffered post-traumatic stress from the war. We took a lovely Malamute called Baloo over, big fella, and sat chatting with them, that was great.”

“Also, the highlight for me is always when someone gets a home. When I go in and find out that one of them got a home. I’m over the moon. Literally. Because I’m secretly thinking, ‘No-one’s going to take this little fella, look at the state of him’, and thankfully someone does.”