

Interview



Howard Hughes has been on air from the age of 16 – when he won a disc jockey contest organised by Liverpool playwright Alan Bleasdale. The prize was 15 minutes on Radio City, from that moment he was hooked by the medium.

A few years later, Howard became Radio City's first Graduate News Trainee – the station gave him the finest grounding anyone could have. Building on that training, Howard has gone on to work as a journalist and presenter at stations as diverse as BBC Berkshire, BRMB, County Sound and Power FM, where he devised the UK's first musicradio "short form" news format.

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HOWARD HUGHES

Howard spent two great years at Independent Radio News and a decade as part of the on air team at Capital FM's Chris Tarrant Breakfast Show. He travelled the world with Chris and the team broadcasting from places like Maui, Mauritius, Monaco, the Great Barrier Reef, Perth, and Cape Town. He's also covered the death of Princess Diana and broadcast live from Ground Zero.

Howard has also worked at LBC - where he presented a phone-in with the Prime Minister, anchored news on the Nick Ferrari Breakfast Show and devised a programme about radio across the globe called "Howard's World." - He's also worked for Kelvin Mackenzie at talkSPORT, where he created and presented the UK's first national show on the paranormal, "The Unexplained."

During his two and a half years at GMG Radio Howard pioneered the news format for the Smooth stations – and spent 13 hours on air anchoring coverage of "7/7." He was one of the first to break news of the London terror attacks.

In 2007 Howard was presented with the IRN Special Award for Contribution to Commercial Radio – his eighth radio Award. He has also been a Judge for the Sony and Arqiva Awards. Howard has trained news broadcasters for GMG, UKRD, Capital Radio Group, SRH, SABC South Africa and others. In 2007 Howard decided after many, many years of 4am starts all over the UK to take a career break.

In 2008 he returned to the airwaves as a freelance presenter at stations like Liverpool's CityTalk (where he has filled in on most shows including the legendary Pete Price Phone-in) and BBC Three Counties Radio (including the Jonathan Vernon Smith Consumer Show). He also helped Steve Penk launch his Manchester station, 96.2 The Revolution.

Howard's interviewed celebrities and newsmakers including Tony Blair, David Bowie, Prince Albert of Monaco, Lionel Richie, Paul McCartney, The Pet Shop Boys and Liverpool's own Atomic Kitten!

The Howard Hughes voiceover credits include the annual British Comedy Awards (live v/o and commentary), ITV shows including Denis Norden's Laughter Files, Cilla's Moment of Truth, Simply the Best and The South Bank Show. He's also done trailers for the likes of CNN and he's station voice for County Sound Radio/UKRD.

Howard can produce voice material by Mp3 using either a smooth tube or gritty dynamic broadcast mic. In 2006, he took "The Unexplained" to the internet – it now has listeners from New Zealand to Newcastle and from San Diego to Southampton!!

Q. Howard, radio is changing almost by the day. How much have you had to change the way you work to account for the changes?

A. Massively!!! In 2007, after getting the IRN Special Award, I decided to take a career break after many, many years of 4am starts. People thought it was a crazy thing to do and there were times when I wondered if I'd done the right thing. But I came back with a fresh perspective. I have taken everything I do back to basics, learned new skills like sound engineering (I am a big fan of dbx compression and smooth tube microphones these days!!) and more or

less started again. I've learned playout systems like Dalet and BBC RadioMan so I can present shows. Plus I have, I hope, learned to adapt my style to whichever outlet I am on. I believe much of the future of radio will be online - and am thrilled to be celebrating three years of my own presence on the net.

Q. Radio bulletins are no longer as 'local' as they should be. Are you disappointed that networking is taking over?

A. Yes and no. If networking means better written and read news that's OK. BUT... if networking means limp



local content and bulletins “chucked” together by overworked operatives that’s bad news - and will surely lose listeners for some stations. Used intelligently, I think networking can make a big sound on fewer bucks. I know how to do that - I learned it through experience - and would love to share that information with stations.

Q. You are spending a lot of time on the road working across the country. What have you learned on your travels?

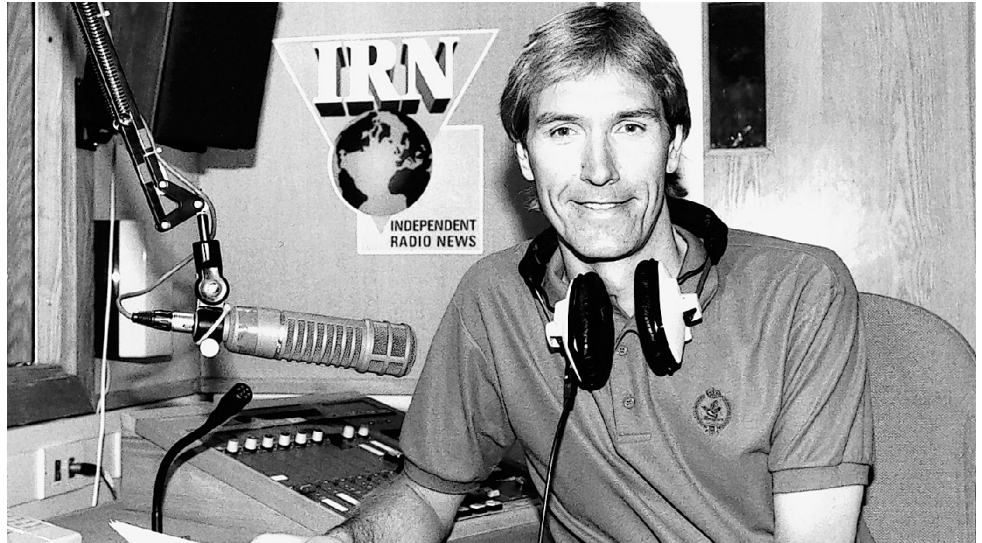
A. I have learned to unpack my bags fast - and get stuck into whatever I am doing. And I've loved it! I've discovered that London is not automatically the seat of the best radio available - there are great people and fine stations many miles from the capital city.

Q. You re-launched your Unexplained website on the Pete Price show on Radio City recently. Give me some of the highlights of some of the incidents and issues you've found?

A. The latest Edition has an exclusive studio interview with American Larry Warren - who says he experienced the UK's scariest “UFO” encounter and was heavily de-briefed by the US military afterwards! I like David Icke - and if any of what he says is right then we, as a planet, have a problem. I am also a fan of space expert Richard Hoagland who is sure we went to the Moon (he covered the missions for CBS with the great Walter Cronkite!) and certain we've never been told what was found there!

Q. Richard Park is installed back at Capital. Have you already heard a major difference in the output?

A. Richard has done what he does best - he's gone in and sprinkled gold-dust on the output. I really wish he'd been there



when I was at LBC 97.3 doing presentation and news on the Nick Ferrari Show a few years ago.

Q. Global, Bauer, GMG... the big radio groups are making changes to keep up with the reduction in revenues. Who do you anticipate will be the winners/losers in this recession?

A. This I have learned from my travels. The winners will be those who put good radio first and trust in the certain fact that revenue will follow. It has been wonderful to see how they use that principle at Radio City - and the figures don't lie. I have many friends at UKRD - they have always known their USP is “localness” and they manage to team it with a big, professional sound.

Q. Radio news has taken a bit of a battering in recent years. Who are the up and coming stars that you've met on your travels?

A. Check people like Laura Harnes and Toby Gilles at Radio City. News Ed Steve Hothersall has every right to be proud of his team. Katie Collins has just joined GMG - she has a very natural

“sound” and a zest for the work.

Q. It's a while since we last discussed your radio dream team... how has it changed?

Many of my usual suspects are still there - Tommy Vance, Kenny Everett, Mr Tarrant...I'd also add in CityTalk's Duncan Barks (and his producer Mick!), Magic's Angie Greaves (what a voice!) and the late, great and wonderful Mike Dickin - the finest talk show host the UK ever produced. His last (very wise) email to me told me to push myself forward more if I wanted to get the gigs. And if I could... I'd like to add the whole on air team at KNX Los Angeles who covered the recent Michael Jackson story superbly - they had most of the main players in Jacko's life on air and talking within two hours of the sad news being released. Now that's what I called newstalk radio!!! Richard Park, City's Richard Maddock, Radio Nova's Chris Cary and John Myers to the dream team - we'll need great management who understand radio and BBC Three Counties Deputy Ed. Paul Jirgens.

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