

Pumping iron

*rich vegetables

Meet **Joe Wicks** – an Instagram fitness guru who makes £1m a month out of broccoli

THE RT INTERVIEW BY **ROBERT CRAMPTON**



ONLINE FITNESS AND diet guru Joe Wicks is a very modern celebrity. He's barely been on TV (although that is about to change). His first book only came out at the end of December (it sold over 75,000 copies in its first week). And yet to many hundreds of thousands of fans across the planet, Wicks is a bona fide star. He has become – not precisely overnight but nonetheless in very short order – an internet and social media phenomenon. In two years, starting from absolutely nowhere, this young man from Surrey has accumulated 1.3 million followers on Instagram under the name TheBodyCoach. That figure is, I'm reliably informed by those who know about these things, seriously impressive.

How has this happened? Well, first things first: Wicks, 30, has an amazingly fine physique. Amazingly fine, that is, in terms of what most women – and therefore most men, if they've got an ounce of sense – these days desire in a bloke. Not too skinny, not too pumped either. The key word is lean. At five foot ten and 11 stone, Wicks is certainly that. It's no coincidence that "lean in 15" (as in minutes, for his suggested healthy recipes, and seconds, for the length of the videos he originally put out) is the slogan that snagged the public interest back when he first started posting stuff in January 2014.

It doesn't hurt that he's also handsome. Or that he's one of the few to combine exercise and nutrition advice in the same package. Obviously we all know about celebrity chefs. And although less high-profile, there are just as many workout wannabes plying their trade on DVDs. Wicks manages to nail both elements, with the emphasis on the first one.

"It's all about nutrition. You can train, train, train all you want but I always say you can't out-train a bad diet," he says, and he's right. Here's

what you have to do, he says. Here's what you have to eat (and not eat) to look (although this is implied rather than stated outright) as good as I do. That's his pitch. It's a winner.

The chief reason for his popularity is the same as any individual who succeeds in showbusiness. (Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook being, after all, simply the latest manifestations of an age-old industry.) Wicks, as I discover when we meet, is an engaging, energetic character, passionate about his mission to "get people moving and eating healthily". He's genuine. Sure he's ambitious, sure he wants to make money, but punters don't care about that. What they want is commitment, realism and authenticity. Which is what he offers, and why he's pulled ahead of a crowded online field, and why he will be a star of what is still (just about) the mainstream media before the year is out.

WE MEET FOR breakfast at a studio in east London. Wicks orders poached eggs and avocado on toast. "This is a healthy breakfast," he explains. "Yeah, I could have had the full English, but I thought no, keep it lean. Healthy fats, protein, a bit of carbs, it's all about balance. It's not about cutting anything out, it's about moderation and the right proportions at the right time." Which is, in a nutshell (nuts, along with eggs and butter, being considered good healthy fats, as opposed to the bad, hydrogenated, unhealthy fats blasted into ready meals and the like) pretty much the received wisdom as regards nutrition. A received wisdom that Wicks is doing his best to promote. (He has been attributed with the 25 per cent increase in sales of tenderstem broccoli since his book came out.)

He reminds me of both the young Jamie ▷



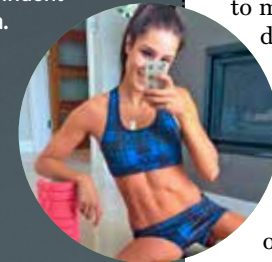
‘People say I’m Jamie Oliver and Russell Brand’s love child...’

PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR RT BY NEALE HAYNES

THE ONLINE GURUS

KAYLA ITSINES

The Aussie fitness sensation (right) inspires millions to get bikini body confident via her app, Sweat with Kayla.
INSTAGRAM Kayla_itsines
FOLLOWERS 5.5m



JOHN CHAPMAN AND LEON BUSTON

UK-based personal trainers and friends, offering diet tips and motivational exercise tutorials.
YOUTUBE The Lean Machines
YOUTUBE VIEWS 17m

ADRIENE MISHLER

An actor and yoga teacher based in Austin, Texas, who provides free content for people of all shapes and sizes.
YOUTUBE Yoga with Adriene
YOUTUBE VIEWS 100m

◀ Oliver (who I interviewed almost 20 years ago) and (almost ten years ago) the emerging Russell Brand. Whatever your opinion of the trajectory of those two since, back in the day Jamie and Russell were principally defined by their youthfully infectious charisma. Wicks is the same.

“People say I’m Jamie Oliver’s and Russell Brand’s love child,” he jokes. “Jamie is brilliant. He’s so hard-working! He sent me a tweet when I hit one million followers on Instagram. I don’t know Russell Brand but I like him a lot. I think he’s a good guy.”

As with Brand and Oliver, legitimately or otherwise, Wicks speaks with a chirpy cockney accent. He was raised in Epsom, Surrey, where his dad was (and is) a roofer (with ambitions to become a yoga teacher) and his mum, having re-entered education as a mature student, was (and is) a social worker. His parents split up when Joe was a child. He is still close to both.

In Epsom, he attended “a normal state school”, leaving at 16 and going to a local technology college, and then on to study sports science at St Mary’s University in Twickenham. Always keen on sport and possessed with unlimited energy, he thought first about becoming a PE teacher but instead, after a stint travelling in Asia and Australia, opted to be a personal trainer. “I hit that age [about 24] and knew that was what I was supposed to do.”

HE THEN DECIDED that he wanted to work for himself. “I soon worked out I didn’t want to be in a gym making them money and getting paid peanuts.” So he set up his own brand – in Richmond, south-west London.

“I did this bootcamp called Rumble in the Park. I had this vision I’d be the next British Military Fitness. I borrowed two grand from my mum and dad to do my course and buy the equipment. I didn’t make a single penny for a year. I remember sitting with my dad and saying, ‘Dad, I’m really upset, I don’t think I’m going to be able to pay you back that money,’ and he’s like, ‘I don’t care, I just

want to know you’re happy?” His mum, he says, had exactly the same attitude.

Just five years ago, Wicks was cycling from his flat in Surbiton to Richmond Tube station every morning at 6am, kettle bells and boxing gear in a trailer behind him, to take classes to which hardly anybody came. He’d end up dishing out his leaflets and going home again. “Now I’ve got an office with 50 staff right outside the station, so I can look out my window and see where I used to hand out flyers. It’s such a crazy story. I took my mum to the office for the first time the other day. When she saw the building, she was so proud, she cried. My mum, dad and nana can’t believe I’ve got this proper global company. Neither can I. Sometimes I go in and think ‘I’m the bloody boss!’”

The catalyst for his meteoric rise from zero to hero can be summed up in one word: Instagram. “When they started video in 2014, I began

uploading motivational stuff about fitness and nutrition. It was just me in my kitchen, talking to myself basically. I didn’t know what I was doing, but I kept posting, got a bit louder and cheekier and people started to relate to that. The community started to build.”

A big part of his burgeoning appeal, he realised, was that he was a normal bloke, a realist about the way people live. “I always say it’s OK to have the odd burger or Nandos, or get pissed once in a while. You can be fit and healthy and still have fun.”

Sifting through the feedback, he clocked that “loads of people were struggling on all these awful diets – meal replacement shakes, fat burning pills, cleansing juice. I thought: this ain’t the way to do it. You’ve got to give your body the right fuel.”

HE MANAGED TO monetise his social media success by coming up with a 90-day exercise and nutrition plan that sells for £147 and is now the basis for his new show on Channel 4. Thus far he’s sold 110,000 plans. “That’s a lot of money.” As is the “seven-figure” advance he received for a six-book publishing deal on the back of the extraordinary sales of volumes one and two of *Lean in 15*, which have sold over one million copies in under seven months, more books than any other author in 2016.

He’s barely had time to spend any of the money (he reportedly makes £1 million a month), beyond buying his mum a house and treating his mates to a holiday in Vegas. “I’m so busy, 24/7.” No time even for a girlfriend, he says, although he’s building a house because “one day I want a family”.

“I feel like I’ve won the lottery,” he says. “It’s mad. I was invited to an entrepreneurship conference at King’s College the other day. I was sitting there with Jo Malone and Heston Blumenthal, thinking, ‘This is insane, I can barely cook. I just put stuff out on Instagram.’”

Although these days, he’s more into Snapchat than anything. When we met at 10am, he’d already posted seven video clips. And put out

five tweets. And made three contributions to Instagram, shared to Facebook.

“You’ve got to be obsessive. You’ve got to keep putting out a lot of content.” With that he takes a photo of his breakfast and uploads it.

“I always say, ‘The camera eats first’. I’m putting out the story of my life, all day, every day. You follow it, you think you know me. People love it. It looks like I’m having the time of my life.” And is he? “Yeah,” he laughs, “I’m having so much fun!”

RT Books To order *Lean in 15* by Joe Wicks for £12.50 incl p&p, call **0344 245 8092** quoting ref RTLEANS35 or visit radiotimes.com/lean35



‘The odd burger is OK. You can be fit and healthy and still have fun’

JOE WICKS

EROTIME.CO.UK