

DOGGONE...

meet the Devon natives
who have become
internet superstars

Devon has produced some pretty big stars over the years and Labradors Olive and Mabel are no exception. Their antics have captured a nation's heart – with a little help from their owner, sports commentator Andrew Cotter. **CHRISSEY HARRIS** talks to him

Andrew, Olive and Mabel enjoy the great outdoors whenever they can.

'Far more people in the wider public will recognise me now as the guy who talks to his dogs, rather than the one who commentates on the Olympics or Wimbledon'



You never forget the day you picked up your puppy. “It’s a very, very vivid memory,” says Andrew Cotter, recalling his trip to South Molton, North Devon, eight years ago to collect black Labrador, Olive.

“Going to a dog breeder when there are puppies around is a slightly chaotic experience but then picking up the one that’s yours, carrying it out to the car and taking her home, you know it’s the start of a grand adventure.

“Although, I didn’t know it was going to go in this direction...”

Sports commentator Andrew is talking about his slightly unusual career diversion, which has seen him use his skills to document the lives of his Devon-born dogs, Olive, eight and Mabel, four.

It started during the first lockdown in March last year when, bored at home with no sport around, Andrew decided to commentate on Olive and Mabel’s breakfast time.

The video went viral and broadcaster Andrew – regarded as one of the leading commentators on the BBC’s

golf, rugby, tennis and athletics coverage – temporarily switched subjects.

Olive and Mabel’s lives are now played out on a global stage, with footage of the Devon-born dogs going for their daily walk, taking part in a Zoom call or competing over a squeaky bone, watched by millions of people across the world.

Andrew has even written a book, called *Olive, Mabel and Me: Life and Adventures with Two Very Good Dogs*.

“My life has entirely changed, basically,” says Scottish-born Andrew, speaking to *Devon Life* from his home in Cheshire, with Olive snoozing at his feet. “Having a book about dogs and doing videos about dogs has essentially become a job. I never wanted it to be that but that is what has filled the gap, sort of entertaining myself and hopefully some other people as well.”

No one could have predicted how widespread the need was to spend 90 seconds watching two dogs standing in a pond or eating their breakfast while their owner

IT’S A DOG’S LIFE

Like many of us, Andrew realises he’s lucky to be a dog owner during lockdown. “I have no idea what I would have done, never mind employment-wise,” he says. “Mentally, you need them. You need to talk to them and stroke them and just have that presence in the house that’s just wandering around, oblivious to all the issues in the world.”

commentates on the side lines.

“That’s been the most gratifying part of it, when you see the reaction coming back and how it does mean something to people,” says Andrew, still blown away by Olive and Mabel’s star status. “They get recognised all the time, it’s ridiculous. People will stop and say: ‘is that Olive and Mabel?’. ‘Can I have a photo?’ ‘Yes,’ I say, ‘I’ll just carry on walking and they can just catch me up...’”

Andrew admits creating new ▶

Photo: Andrew Cotter

Olive and Mabel’s lives are now played out on a global stage



Photo: Ian Cameron



Photo: Ian Cameron

ABOVE:
Andrew has been on many adventures with his dogs.

content for his pets' legions of fans can be difficult at times, especially when Olive and Mabel don't play ball. Or fetch. Or do anything they're told to do.

"It's less stressful doing the sports broadcasting," says Andrew, who has covered the Olympic Games, Wimbledon, The Masters, the Six Nations, Rugby World Cup, the World Athletics Championships and the Boat Race during his 24-year broadcasting career. "When you're commentating on sports events, the sport is the main event and my commentary is just the bit on top of that, whereas when you make video or you're writing a book, what you do is everything," he says. "You worry about whether it's going to be good enough or funny enough.

Also, you've got to come up with the ideas. I don't have to come up with the idea for the Olympic Games – someone has already done that."

Despite the challenges, Andrew is enjoying discovering just how transferable his skills are but is hoping for a return to business as usual at some stage this year.

With Wimbledon and then the Olympics due to take place (in theory) it could be time to fall back on the sporting commentary job.

"Doing the Olympic opening ceremony is just a huge thing in a sports broadcaster's career," says Andrew. "When that does happen, I hope people won't be going, 'oh, that's the guy who does the dogs!' But I know that ship has sailed. Far more people

in the wider public will recognise me now as the guy who talks to his dogs, rather than the one who commentates on the Olympics or Wimbledon. But that's no bad thing, I can do both."

One person who will definitely be listening out is Helen Harvey, owner of Ridgeway Labradors in South Molton, where Olive and Mabel started life.

She is delighted that two of her pups have gone on to achieve so much.

"I am so utterly proud, chuffed to pieces," she says, speaking from her living room, currently home to the latest litter of Labradors. Helen and her family have been breeding top-quality dogs since 1998 and have many repeat customers, including Andrew, who came back to buy

BELOW:
Helen Harvey of Ridgeway Labradors with her latest additions.

A LOVE OF LABRADORS

Helen Harvey set up Ridgeway Labradors in 1998 with her first litter of puppies, using her original Labrador, Jeffrey, as the sire.

She is passionate about the breed and says she feels privileged to be doing what she's doing. "It's not just breeding dogs," says Helen, who says she has a few celebrities on her books. "It's my way of changing people's lives.

"Every day I work so hard so that all my customers can experience the joy of a Ridgeway Labrador puppy."



Photo: Ridgeway Labradors

Mabel four years ago.

“I remember Olive and Mabel well,” says Helen, who is devoted to her puppies. She is with them as soon as they are born, handling them and getting to know them before they’re old enough to start life with their new owners.

“It’s been so lovely to see them doing so well. I took a screenshot of the TV when I saw them on the BBC and ran upstairs to tell my daughter. We’re all so proud. I want to send lots of love to Olive and Mabel!”

They might have fans all over the world, but Olive, Mabel and Andrew have never forgotten where it all started.

“Helen’s lovely and they’re fantastic dogs,” says Andrew, as Olive looks up at him impatiently because he mentioned they might be going to the beach. “We’d love to come back to Devon when we’re allowed,” he adds. “We’ve got some friends in Totnes, so we’ll come down again soon, I’m sure, and go for some nice walks along the River Dart.”

The perfect homecoming for two very special celebrities. ♦ andrewcotter.co.uk; ridgewaylabradors.co.uk

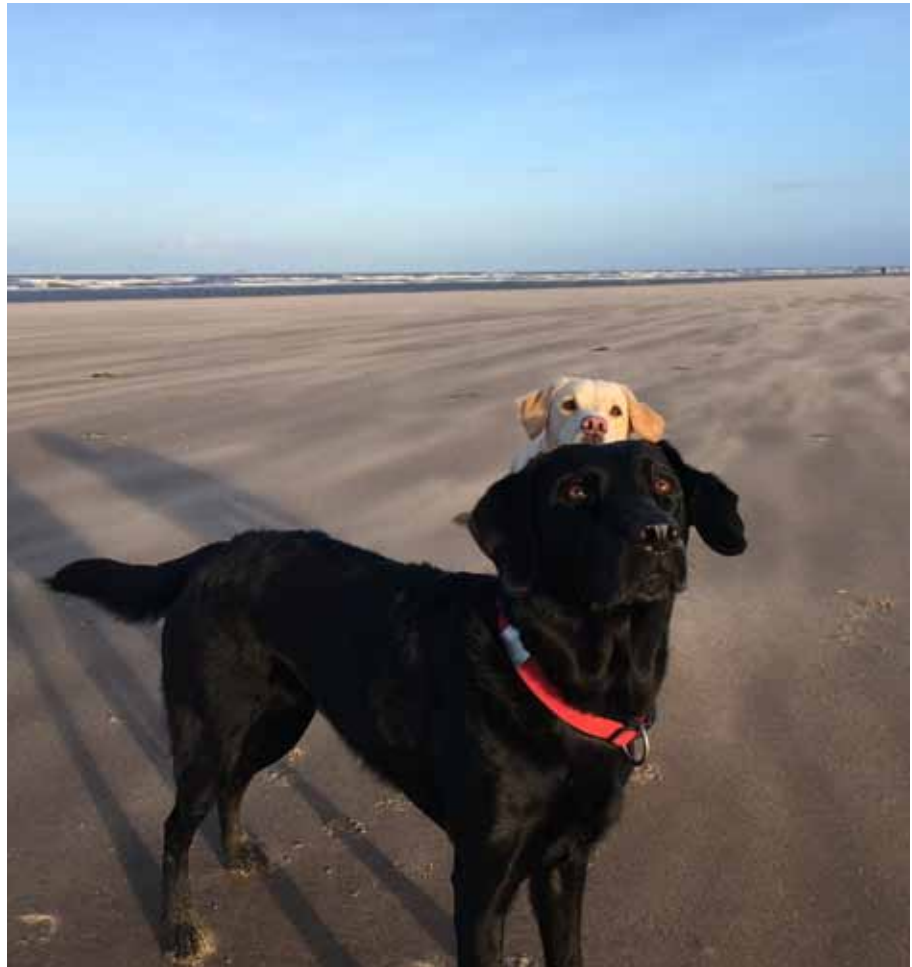


Photo: Andrew Cotter

Andrew Cotter, Olive and Mabel are looking forward to a trip to Devon



Photo: Andrew Cotter

Andrew Cotter with his Devon-born dogs (l-r) Mabel and Olive