



INSIDE THE
MAD
WORLD
OF HENRIK STENSON

Now encamped in the world's top 10, the icy exterior of this cool Swede belies a playful character who loves practical jokes. We tried to find out what makes him tick.

WORDS BY PAUL MAHONEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES CHEADLE AND GETTY IMAGES

Are all Swedes crazy?

I am one of the more sensible ones (laughs). I don't do the dippy stuff. I wouldn't dress in extreme ways like Jesper Parnevik or Jarmo Sandelin.

So explain that pants shot in Miami...

I hit a really poor tee shot which travelled on the wind and ended up in the hazard, but on the mud with the ball in a decent shape. I felt like I could hack it out of the mud but obviously playing in Florida, I didn't have any rain gear. I couldn't really afford to play in any of my clothes as they would have been a real mess down the last six holes I had to play. I was only wearing two things when I hit the shot – my jocks and my golf glove. Just the way God created me. Shirt, trousers, socks, shoes, hat, the lot was off. I don't think I'll ever hear the end of that. Maybe I'll get a phone call from Playgirl?

Stenson drew global attention to himself when he played this semi-naked shot at Doral in March.



Did Fanny [Sunesson, his caddie] advise you to take everything off?

Well, it wasn't quite like a club selection discussion. She didn't tell me to go for the full Monty! I just felt I could save a shot by playing the ball and that has to be worth taking your shirt and trousers off for. Apparently, Pádraig Harrington was asked about it and he said he wasn't surprised because I come from Sweden.

You have a reputation for being a prankster. True or false?

When we were playing in China, once, I bought a pen that gave you an electric shock when you clicked the top to make the nib come out. I went along the range all week getting guys to write down their email addresses (laughs). No one trusts me with a pen anymore. And at the Eisenhower Trophy (the amateur team championships) in Chile, I found water balloons in the supermarket and we filled them up and chucked them out of the hotel windows. I don't really want to ever grow up.

Are you living the dream?

People see us on TV on beautiful courses

with trophies and big cheques. But, that's just the top players. There are many out here struggling to pay their mortgage and provide for their families. I have been very fortunate.

What's the most pressure you've ever felt?

When your caddie is rattling in the bag to see if he's got any provisionals left when you're standing over a drive, you know you've got a problem (laughs). In 2001, at the tournament we played at the K Club, I had no idea where my drives were going to go. One went 400 yards left and another went 400 yards right. I was shaking and my hands felt like jelly. It became a mental problem. I even practised hitting balls with my eyes shut because I was thinking too much about what I was trying to do. I was the first guy

on the range and the last guy off it, and I would still play like crap.

What motivates you?

I'm not so sure I dreamt of being world No.1, but I definitely dreamt of playing in the Ryder Cup and winning Majors. I've ticked one of those off my list. If I stopped tomorrow I would be very happy with my career, but I hope I can win one, two, three or four Majors. It is not likely that you are going to win too many times in a season. Two is lucky. But you are only ever one week away from a victory. When you know you can't win going into the weekend, there are still world ranking points and Ryder Cup points to play for and now there's the Race to Dubai. But there have been times when I've



Stenson has sampled that Ryder Cup winning at the K Club in 2006 – now Majors are a priority.

been tied for 63rd on a Saturday, and I admit I have given up. If you try to finish like a champion, even though it might only be to finish 58th, it gives you positive momentum for the following week.

Who's your favourite, Seve or Faldo?

Both, really. I would prefer to be a Faldo man to have a longer career, you know, keeping the ball on the fairway and not getting into too much trouble. But it's more thrilling to watch Seve and play that way, hitting it sideways and getting up and down from all over the place. A hybrid of them would be the ultimate.

What was your first car and what do you drive now?

When I turned 18 I inherited my parents' old BMW 320. It was white, which is obviously a great colour to have in Sweden in winter with all that slush and snow. It was my first love. I still drive BMWs, but I have a Porsche in Dubai, and a BMW M6 and an X5 for the family. I can still squeeze the family in to the Porsche.

What's on your iPod?

I've been listening to Coldplay, Keane and Snow Patrol. That kind of laid back rock sound. But I also like a bit of a disco beat, too. I can fall asleep to Eurobeat sounds, but not too much of that techno psychedelic stuff. I like classical, too.

What's your karaoke song?

"With or Without You" by U2. My wife

'I BOUGHT A PEN THAT GAVE YOU AN ELECTRIC SHOCK WHEN YOU CLICKED THE TOP TO MAKE THE NIB COME OUT'

caught me singing along to it at home once and now she always teases me to get up and sing it. Or ruin it.

Is science killing golf?

Are we hitting more greens than they did 50 years ago? I don't think so. The best players still miss four or five greens a round, no matter what gear they're using. OK, the courses are longer and tougher, but the skill of players hasn't changed that much. But it is harder to shape the ball now. Every sport evolves. Tennis players don't use wooden racquets and we don't play with persimmon clubs. They could make the ball fly 400 yards if they wanted to but there has to be a limit. Courses can still be made difficult with firmer greens guarded by water and bunkers, thick rough and tight fairways. I'm not a fan of monster courses. Whatever happened to great short-iron par threes?

Life mottos?

Honesty and respect. Do we live by them all the time? Probably not.

What do you dislike about yourself?

My self-discipline could always be a notch higher. If it really gets into me that I need to do something, then I do it. But sometimes I could work harder.

What do you complain about in hotels?

Small things drive me mad. Like if there is a button on the telephone in your room to press for room service but it doesn't work or nobody answers. Why do they even bother putting it on the phone? That is so annoying.

What's the worst pro-am disaster you've witnessed?

There was a journalist (I'll keep his name secret to save his embarrassment) who looked like he swung a very aggressive practice swing on the first tee. Then he did it again. Then we realised they weren't practice swings. He had whiffed two and on the third swing he hit the ball so much on the heel of the driver that he almost took his left leg off and the ball just trickled down into the water. And he turns round and says: "I haven't played much lately." And I thought, "Really!" There was another guy I played with in Portugal once who hit his divot over the ball and covered it completely.

Ikea furniture. Good or bad?

They make some good stuff. They do, really. But it can be pretty hard to get it all together at times. The worrying thing is you finish, and then you find you have a couple of nuts and bolts left over. ■

