

The joy of a CHRISTMAS QUIZ!

It won't come as any surprise that Carol Vorderman is quite competitive – and never more so than when it comes to a family quiz

I've always loved quizzes and games. I grew up in an intensely competitive family and I remember spending a lot of time playing chess and board games.

At Christmas, the Monopoly board was permanently set out – the games would go on for days and days. My brother, Anton, was always the banker, although we had to make extra sets of paper money because our box had been picked up in a jumble sale and most of the Monopoly money was missing.

By the time I was old enough to really get into playing games, my sister, Trixie (who is 10 years older than me), had pretty much left home, and with my mum working long hours, Anton (who is eight years older) was often left in charge of me.

We were very close. He taught me how to play chess properly, against the clock.

We'd play endless rounds of card games, too – gin rummy or the memory game where you turn over two cards and try to identify as many pairs as you can.

But at Christmas, we'd descend on my Auntie Dilys and our cousins, who lived on a farm not far from our flat in north Wales. They all loved playing games as much as we did. Christmas was always

Quizzes are my forte



Carol loved all sorts of games as a child



great fun, with lots of silly games, often involving shouting out the answers.

My birthday is on Christmas Eve – I'm a proper Christmas Carol! – so I always felt as if the celebrations were held partly in my honour! I adore every single aspect of Christmas, from the roaring fires and carol singing to all the twinkling lights.

This year, I'll be 63 and, although we don't have any firm plans, as long as I'm with my children (Katie, 32, and Cameron, 26), I don't care where we are. But whatever we do and wherever we are, there will definitely be quizzes and games peppered throughout the day. I love the idea of bringing everyone together after a big Christmas lunch, switching off the TV and getting stuck into a bit of friendly competitive rivalry. Doing quizzes at Christmas is such a great way to bring the different generations together. And they are so much fun!

PERFECT 10

Quizzes are very much my 'thing'. I was a bit of a maths whizz as a child – all I ever wanted to do was sums – and I had 26 wonderful years completing fast word and number tasks on the TV show *Countdown*.

I also leapt at every invitation to appear on TV quiz shows. I used to love a pub quiz, too – it's amazing how much information you accumulate over the years – but I don't get invited much these days. It would be a bit like sneaking a professional footballer to a Sunday game!

The idea for my *Perfect 10* quiz

podcast, which launched earlier this year, came about when I was chatting with my friend Russ Lindsay about how odd it was that there were so many quiz shows on TV and so few quiz podcasts.

We came up with a short, 10-minute 10-round formula, which includes something to educate, to entertain and to irritate, too. The idea is that some questions will make you laugh, others will make you groan with frustration and, when you read the answers, you'll learn something. It's like a little detox for your brain; a quick workout that offers a daily fix for addicts of riddles and puzzles.

The podcast has been so successful that we created the *Perfect 10 Quiz Book* – ideal for Christmas quizzes. The questions are put together so each round challenges a different part of the brain. Some people will always be stronger in certain areas than others because that bit of their brain is more developed. The themes are spread out, too, so younger generations will find some questions easy, and others will come easier to the over-50s. The idea is you don't need a degree, a love of history books or to be a whizz at pub quizzes. I think that's part of the *Perfect 10* charm – it's a clever mix that creates a level playing field between diverse groups of people.

I don't get involved in writing the questions any more – we have a team to do that – but when I dip into the book, I usually manage to average about eight out of 10. Quizzes are my forte, but even I haven't achieved the Perfect 10 more than once or twice! We'll definitely be getting the book out this Christmas – I'm

sure Katie is determined to beat my top score and she has youth on her side!

MENTAL CHALLENGES

There's no doubt that quizzes are good for the brain. Specialists claim that performing mental challenges like this on a regular basis helps maintain cognitive clarity and may perhaps lower the danger of developing neurological diseases such as dementia.

We used to get letters from *Countdown* fans saying that before they went into brain surgery, the doctors would urge them to watch *Countdown* and keep a note of their average score, so that after the operation, they'd know everything was back to normal when they'd arrived back at their pre-op score.

I try to do something to challenge my brain every day, and I'm really pleased that my brain has stayed sharp as I've got older. I love words and word play, and for a while I was obsessed with Sudoku. I actually find those number puzzles really relaxing because the intense focus means you switch off from the constant tide of information bombarding your brain. I'll start with the easiest one, then work my way up to the tricky ones.

I have a very visual brain – when I was younger, I had a photographic memory. In the days before autocue, they called me 'One-take Vorderman' because I could remember a highly technical script in just a few minutes. I do it by 'picturing' the words on the page.

It's funny, but my maths brain works best when I'm able to look for the patterns in numbers that are written down. I'm not nearly so good when the question is read out to me or when someone stops me in the street and asks me to solve some fiendishly complex mathematical equation. If it's on paper, I can see it, but it's much harder to just solve the problems in your head!

I can't promise that getting everyone involved in quizzes this Christmas will help you – or your loved ones – stave off dementia, but I can guarantee you will have lots of fun.

• *Carol Vorderman's Perfect 10 Quiz Book (Ebury) is out now*



Quizzing is a great way to bring the generations together

CAROL'S INSIDER QUIZ-BUSTING TIPS

- Keep a pen and paper handy to jot down elements of the question and any thoughts that might come to mind (the answer might appear more easily when you see the question in front of you).
- The key to deciphering an anagram is to look for unusual letters – such as K or J – to see if they trigger a word linked to the clue. Writing the letters in a circle helps shake them up, too and allows you to see more possibilities than if the letters are ordered in a straight line.
- When it comes to riddles, try to find patterns from previous questions, as these can help you work out the way the riddle-maker's mind works.
- If you don't know an answer, leave it and move on to the next question, but do focus when the answers are revealed, as this is a great way to be better prepared next time a question of that sort comes up.

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