

From Top Gear to Botswana with Andy Wilman

18/09/2026 The executive producer of 'Top Gear' and 'The Grand Tour', Andy Wilman, recalls his most memorable drive – across enormous salt flats in southern Africa.

It can be a difficult task for anyone to determine a single perfect Sunday drive. But if you've experienced roads in 70 different countries, from the bustle of Iraq to the Arctic Circle's snowy wastes, it requires an entirely unique approach.

For Andy Wilman, the executive producer behind 'Top Gear', 'The Grand Tour', and 'Clarkson's Farm' – as well as the author of 'Mr Wilman's Motoring Adventure' – the perfect Sunday drive is not about sweeping corners or smooth tarmac. In fact, his choice includes no real corners, no tarmac, nor even a road.

Andy Wilman's perfect Sunday Drive

"A good Sunday drive is, in essence, like a good meal in a restaurant," says Wilman. "The car and the

road are the food but a meal in a restaurant is really about the company, the setting and the memories."

It's this belief that leads Wilman back to his time shooting 'Top Gear' and 'The Grand Tour', behind the wheel of a camera car, the most memorable moments in which were – like a great restaurant – often found in unexpected places.

"The whole world was our playground," he says. "For me it was an amazing privilege to drive the worst road in the world, because who else gets to do that? I nearly killed our crew when I lost control on a road in Madagascar and hit a tree. But, looking for a silver lining, the view of the 100-foot drop that the tree stopped us from plunging over was amazing ..."

With 'Top Gear's' peak audience estimated at 350 million, Wilman has helped viewers across the world vicariously experience countless bucket-list drives, but it was the day when the cameras finally stopped rolling that he says stands out the most.

Across the Salt Pans of Botswana

Having finished filming the final 'Grand Tour' special in Botswana, the crew raced back to camp from Kubu island across the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans – an enormous salt-crusted expanse once part of a prehistoric lake that was larger than Switzerland.

As Wilman describes in his new book, "... it was like a Star Wars battalion, all of these red lights and the dust flying up. You have phalanxes of headlights beside you, and you know that if one car gets snatched and bogged down by the soft salt then the whole convoy is stopped. It's a real challenge because the salt is pulling at the wheel and you have to keep your foot down. You can't lose each other, so you stay close and it all makes you feel so beyond alive."

While that exact route is best left to experts, a marked track to Kubu Island can be driven in the dry season (typically June to October) with proper preparation. From Maun, head east on the A3 for 81 kilometres, turn right towards Kumaga (Xhumaga) for 60 km, then enter via Kumaga Gate. The reward is a rare kind of Sunday drive: across a vast, shimmering salt crust, with antelope, meerkats and migrating zebra and flamingos along the way.

Yet Wilman's idea of a Sunday drive has evolved as much as his career. Before '*Top Gear*', his first Porsche moment came while filming '*Jeremy Clarkson's Motorworld*' in 1996. While interviewing the now president of the FIA, Mohammed Ben Sulayem, the crew were unexpectedly handed the keys to a Ferrari F40, F50, Jaguar XJ220 and Porsche 959. "He just said 'I've got business to do, enjoy yourselves' and I thought 'who does that?'," says Wilman.

As the self-declared worst driver in the crew – "it took me five attempts to pass my driving test" – Wilman was given the 'user-friendly' 959 and joined a convoy now worth millions onto the Emirati highways. "Because everyone knew they were his cars, they got out of our way," he says.

Porsche and the Top Gear years

Porsche would later play its part in defining '*Top Gear*' itself – from early budget challenges featuring the 924, 944 and 928 to the era-defining 'holy trinity' test on '*The Grand Tour*', where the Porsche 918 triumphed over the LaFerrari and McLaren P1. But Wilman's own tastes have remained more grounded. "Everyone at the 'Grand Tour' office would make fun of me because, of all the press cars available, I'd always choose something boring."

That was, until recently. With the objective of having a comfortable ride, a decently sized fuel tank and – if possible – the approval of his colleagues, Wilman bought his first Porsche Macan. He liked it and so when it came time to replace it, he bought another one and then another after that. "If you're looking for a Macan-sized SUV then why not just get a Macan?" he says. And it is a car that has given him a different perspective on what a Sunday drive can be.

"I'm much more at peace now," he says. "The chaos has gone. I can do that lovely civilian thing – drive down to our place in southern Italy with my wife and our dog." After deserts and boulders, it's a quieter journey, but no less meaningful. "I've had all those Sunday drives," he reflects. "This is a more peaceful one. The perfect Sunday drive, in fact – Italy, in our Macan."

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