

## ● REALLY BIG SHOW

# Graham Norton

## Hottest guy there is here



Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley, the stars of "Absolutely Fabulous," recruited talk-show host Graham Norton for an episode.

MARCEL THOMAS IMAGES

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**A**NYONE who's watched the British talk show "So Graham Norton" knows the impish 39-year-old host is quite easily scandalized.

Yes, his show is filled with naughty bits, such as the time he gave guest Carrie Fisher panties with a built-in vibrator or the Web sites he surfs each night, including the one devoted to "pedal pumpers" (people who like to press accelerators on cars and other vehicles to add a little vroom to their sex life).

But Norton himself isn't explicit in the least. He bounds around the studio of his show, delightfully shocked by how unexpectedly vulgar British viewers can be.

"I can't believe you said that!" is a common enough statement from Norton, even if he did spend five minutes teasing out scandalous details. But really, despite the odd sex toy or the prank phone calls to the city of Wet Beaver ("I've never been there myself," jokes Norton), "So Graham Norton" is actually an innocent mix of the usual talk-show blather from Joan Collins, Jane Seymour and the like, along with tidbits about sex that are truly

about as dirty as two kids making mud pies — yes, it's a mess; but it's all in good fun.

American viewers who haven't caught up with Norton's antics yet have a perfect chance this week, since new episodes of his chat show air every Monday and Friday on BBC America at 11 p.m.

Look for that Carrie Fisher segment, along with Norton's pilgrimage to America where he's given a tour of Dollywood by Dolly Parton herself.

His popularity in the UK is certainly at an all time high. DVDs collecting the best bits from his shows are big sellers. "So Graham Norton" was just named the top Talk Show in annual awards that are the industry's most prestigious. And it now airs five nights a week at 10 p.m. over there, which is almost unheard of in the UK.

Since the British love to tear down celebrities almost as much as they love to build them up, has the backlash kicked in yet for the Irish comic?

"Everyone I know who's on television eventually gets spat on in the street," admits Norton in an interview at his offices in London. "Somebody mad hates you.

But no, touch wood, it hasn't happened yet.

"But it will," he says brightly, adding he doesn't even have any bizarre stalkers. "There are people who write to you all the time. But they're not evil. They've just got a lot of time on their hands and enough money for postage."

It's ironic Norton airs on BBC America in the U.S. since he's virtually the defining figure for archival Channel 4. Last year, the BBC tried to lure Norton away with an offer of some \$7.5 million, but he stayed put.

He's also been approached about bringing his shtick here, even going so far as to be optioned at one point by Paramount.

While Norton would love to conquer America as well, he admits to enjoying the security of staying in the relatively small market of London where every media figure seems to have lunch or a drink after work with everyone else.

"Being a bigish fish in a small pond seems quite nice," says Norton.

**SO GRAHAM NORTON**  
Weeknights, 11 p.m., BBC America