



The Daily Mirror Pride of Britain Awards

Carol Vorderman

What makes the show so special?

I think it is the heart within the show and the fact that so many of our winners show that they have been through horrendous situations and come out the other side. But it's not always that way, and sadly some of the winners are still going through hell. The pain is real and the triumph is real and you can't create that. Some of the stories are pretty raw. When you watch the show, it touches something in you. As I say, there's a heart in there, that's why it is so special.

What are you looking forward to the most this year, especially not having the event last year?

I think not having the awards event at The Grosvenor Hotel last year has given us a little chance to review and this year you'll see it shifting a generation and I really, really love that. It's still the Pride Of Britain Awards but it has this new flavour to it.

Also this year we have an Environment Champion Award, which I've been championing for 30 years. I think I was one of the first journalists to talk about climate change back in the 80's and that's brilliant.

How have you found working with Ashley?

I have worked with Ashley many times before – he's just great. I know some of his family too. I was in the jungle with Jordan. He used to talk about Ash a lot. I used to call Jordan my son because he's more or less my son's age and he would talk about Ash all the time and I'd ask him questions about Ash. I know Dani [Ashley's mum]. I've been to see Diversity in Cardiff and I think there was me and about 5,000 twelve year old's that night!

I really admired Diversity's so-called 'controversial' dance. It's a modern view and it was their view and good for them. They came under fire for it but they stuck with it and they are so successful and they are such a decent family and so hard working. Ash has the biggest heart. I know because we've had this conversation many times about how he feels responsible for everyone that works with his company - all the dancers, everyone in the crew. Ashley is a wonderful person and I'm delighted that he's joining me because he has been involved for a few years now and it just feels right.

Do you have any stand out moments?

There are a few, if I watched them all back, then there would be more. But from the early days, there was a wonderful lady called Alex Bell. She adopted seven children with down syndrome over the years. A lot of them were older but they still lived as a family, her and the seven children. She was on the stage and I said 'we've got a lovely surprise for you, here are your children' and they came from the back of the room and the noise was unbelievable.

'We love our Mum, we love our Mum' marching through and everyone was on their feet and they were cheering and shouting. Her oldest child read out a poem to her and oh my God, I was absolutely floored. To see the love was extraordinary because there was no filter. Total heart and you knew that this woman had such unbridled love for these young people. They were her family – a wonderful family. Whilst she was down in London for the Awards, we did up their garden and put things in like benches and swings, so we showed her that on the stage and that was a very special moment.

If you could give a special recognition award, who would it be?

Recently I've been talking about my son and his special educational needs. And there is a lady called Daphne Hamilton Fairley, who set up a school decades ago called Fairley House. She did this because of the lack of state funding for children with severe learning difficulties as my son has. It's heartbreaking. There are thousands of stories where children are waiting years to be assessed and while they wait for that assessment, they are treated just the same way as other children - which is appalling, because they are not the same. Budgets have been slashed and when I say slashed, I mean really slashed, so opening Fairley House really helped and was an incredible thing to do. So she is very special to me.

Is it hard to not get emotional during the Awards?

Yes, it's really hard not to get emotional. What I do is focus on the job in hand and become so familiar with the stories and meet everybody beforehand. So when it comes to the ceremony, I can make the evening the best night of their lives for every single winner.