

Socks appeal

Selina Scott has forsaken her high-profile TV career in the UK and America for an Angora farm in Yorkshire, where she runs a mohair sock business. Tony Greenway went to meet her, and finds out why television really gets her goat

Photographs: Sam Atkins

You,' says Selina Scott with an amused stare, 'will SMELL like a goat now.' Charming. But then we are standing in a field with her herd of Yorkshire Angora goats, and one specimen in particular (with huge woolly ringlets and alarmingly large, curly horns), seems to have taken quite a shine to me. He tucks his head down and nuzzles into my thighs. I back off, but he follows. There's more violent nuzzling, a bit of butting and even some trouser-chewing. Normally, I would yell and

run off: but, well, you can't. Not in front of Selina Scott. 'They're quite friendly little things,' she says, oblivious to the large number of animals now pressing around her. She's obviously completely at home with them. These are her bab

A North Yorkshire farm is an unexpected place to find a former newsreader and global TV broadcaster; but here she is, pulling off the neat trick of looking undeniably glam in a mauve fleece and minimal make-up, while surrounded by farmyard animals.

Tall, trim and sporting a shaggy blonde bob, Scott poses happily for our photos and then leads us (minus the goats) into her kitchen for tea and cake.

It's hard to pinpoint Scott's accent. Her vowels are very Home Counties, although there is something in her voice - and the way she ends her words, particularly - that hints at her Northern roots. Essentially, though, she could be from anywhere. 'Ah,' she says, 'I'm a mimic. If I go to Scotland, I'll start talking with a Scottish accent. If I'm working down south, I'll sound southern. When I'm in Yorkshire I'll pick up the phone and say in very Yorkshire tones: "Now then!"' She is, in fact, a Yorkshire lass, born in Scarborough 55 years ago (and destined to be a journalist: her grandfather was a former editor of Malton's local paper).

'I like being a Yorkshire girl,' she says, pouring the tea. 'The thing I enjoy about Yorkshire people - and coming back here after a time away only emphasises this - is that they tell it like it is. And they tell you the truth, usually. If you ask "How's your marriage going?" or "Are you making any money these days?" then you get a proper response. And Yorkshire people can turn their hand to anything. In general, they get things done.'

Scott is living proof of this. She started her career in journalism on the Sunday Post in Dundee and then moved to the Isle of Bute as a press officer for the local tourist board. At the age of 29, after working as a presenter for Grampian, she was head hunted by ITN for the News at Ten team - and, despite the serious stories she was covering (such as the Falklands War), a kerfuffle was made in the media about her similarity, looks-wise, to Princess Diana. Scott defected to the BBC where her profile continued to soar, working with Frank Bough on Breakfast

television, co-presenting The Clothes Show and standing in for Terry Wogan on his early evening chat programme. In the late 1980s Scott moved to New York to join American broadcasting giant CBS, and later hosted her own talk show for NBC.

Finally, she became homesick for her friends and family, so her US career couldn't last. 'New York is lovely. But I'm a country girl at heart and you've got to commit yourself (to that life). I think I wasn't committed, fully. Then I realised I could work in America by jetting across the Atlantic. In the end I was a bit like the female version of David Frost. They'd upgrade me sometimes to Concorde, which is ruination for a girl.' In 1997, she signed a £1m contract with Sky - but hasn't done much TV since.

So how about this for down sizing? Scott now feels more at home breeding her goats and using their wool to produce a range of mohair socks which she sells via her website.

Two questions, then: why goats? And why socks?

She laughs. 'I discovered these little goats in a field in Scotland about 14 or 15 years ago. A farmer had looked after them well, but couldn't cope with them anymore. Mohair had fallen in price and they were expensive, so it was a hefty investment for any farmer... so I took them on. They've moved around with me ever since. They've been like a chorus in my life, although other people have been looking after them for me.'

When Scott moved back to Yorkshire all that changed, and a year ago she started her sock business, www.selinascot.com. 'There are 26 goats here,' she says, 'and with vet's fees, care and hay I decided that they have to start paying their way. This is their trust fund. I looked around to see what I could make out of mohair and





found a little manufacturer who makes socks. I tried wearing them and I was hooked. Truly.'

She is enjoying being back in Yorkshire (she bought her farm five years ago) although, when we visit, the builders are in and her house is part-building site. 'Yorkshire isn't a fashionable part of the world... yet,' she says, 'although, it's getting that way. The Cotswolds are highly fashionable and everyone is flocking there. But Yorkshire is more beautiful than the Cotswolds.'

It's clear that Scott - who one interviewer described as 'stubbornly private and solitary' - doesn't care two hoots for fame and patently doesn't enjoy talking about herself. Yet she's welcoming, interested and talkative, and has mastered the art of chatting expressively and freely without giving much away. 'I have a private life,' she says at one point, 'and that's exactly what it is. Private. You'd be out in the public eye the entire time otherwise.'

There is, of course, a certain irony here, and Scott knows it. She did, after all, host big, in-depth TV interviews with the likes of splashy, world-famous names such as Donald Trump. 'Absolutely,' she agrees. 'And Prince Charles. And King Carlos of Spain. But they all had a message they wanted to get across. I don't think they'd have agreed to it had I asked them to do an interview simply about themselves.'

By the late 1990s, she was becoming disillusioned with her TV career and the things she was being asked to do. 'It was Darren Day who finished me in British television. They wanted me to interview him and ask about his sex life. It was my own show for ITV, and I decided it wasn't me. I didn't want to interview Darren Day. And I particularly didn't want to know about his sex life.' She sips her tea. 'That was the end of that.'

But Scott has been back on our

screens of late, even though TV is a medium she has grown to dislike intensely. There is, she says, absolutely nothing on which interests her and no female role models to inspire her. These days the box is a theatre of cruelty - all footie, reality shows, makeover programmes and soaps, so she hardly ever switches on. That's why receiving a final demand to pay her TV licence a few months ago really... um... got her goat.

The threat from the licensing authority coincided with a call from Chris Shaw, a former colleague and controller of channel Five, who was producing a documentary strand called *Don't Get Me Started*. 'Being a good Yorkshire girl, £131.50 means a lot to me if I'm not watching. I'd rather give it to a charity or something. I was really angry. Normally these things go away, but right in the middle of my fuming Chris rang. He asked me if there was something that annoyed me; so I said: "Funnily enough, there is..."'

Scott was off and running again, and making a television show about the dearth of good programmes on TV. She remembers Jenny Bond, the BBC's former royal correspondent, on *I'm a Celebrity Get Me out of Here*. 'She flew halfway round the world to lie in a pit and have rats crawl all over her. What does that say about people in television these days? And the people who run TV?' Not that Scott's *Don't Get Me Started* programme is, she agrees, the best thing to have on her CV. You know: 'TV is awful - look at the state of it! And, ooh, can you give me a job please?' Scott insists it wasn't like that and hasn't let the inevitable fall-out worry her. 'I've had really good responses from lots of people who have written to me with real passion and concern. There were some who said it was a way for me to do interesting telly again. But nothing could be further from my mind.'

Scott is currently presenting an ITV regional programme (not available in Yorkshire) called *Heart of the Countryside*, largely because the subject matter of the stories appeals to her. But, really, she likes being back in Yorkshire with her goats and her farm. Her rural location has crystallised her views on animal welfare, too. 'I don't think I ever gave much thought to the cruelty we inflict on animals until I started to read a bit more about it. Now I've become quite vociferous. The RSPCA brings out report after report, yet it's almost like no one wants to talk about it or do anything about it.'

'I go to Spain a lot and the way they treat animals out there is appalling. There are cats starving and racked with disease, and dogs on short chains. If women were

allowed to voice their views on TV, you'd hear a lot more about that kind of thing. I hear a lot of women - and not particularly men - talking about animal cruelty and animal welfare.'

Perhaps, if she is offered the chance, there's another *Don't Get Me Started* TV polemic here. It would be a worthy subject and something she feels strongly about. But, then, it would have to be - because Selina Scott is not desperate to be on TV at any cost. 'I cantered around the course and did everything I possibly wanted to do in television,' she says. 'I'm in a nice position. If there's something interesting and challenging, I'll do it. If there isn't, I just don't want to know.'

For now, the goats - and a quiet life - are her priority.

