

JOINED BY HER 'COUNTDOWN' CO-STARS
RACHEL RILEY
 REVEALS WHY TWO IS THE PERFECT
 NUMBER AS SHE MARRIES JAMIE GILBERT
 IN A STUNNING SUFFOLK CEREMONY

'A lot of people were present but once Rachel was there it was like there was only one other person in the room' *Jamie*



With Tudor mansion Hengrave Hall as their backdrop, newlyweds Rachel and Jamie pose in the sunshine with Rachel's *Countdown* colleagues, former co-host Jeff Stelling, "new boy" Nick Hewer and Susie Dent. "It has been an extraordinary day," says Nick, who flew in from his home in south-west France for the wedding



For Rachel Riley's legion of *Countdown* fans, there was never any doubt that she would make a stunning bride.

The maths-savvy beauty, whose choice of hemline on *Countdown* once made the evening news, drew gasps of admiration as she walked up the aisle at Hengrave Hall in Suffolk towards her groom Jamie Gilbert in a white, floor-length gown.

"As soon as I saw Jamie, I was waiting for his reaction to my dress," Rachel tells **HELLO!**

"She looked amazing," Jamie, the client account manager for a US software company, enthuses. "A lot of people were at the ceremony but once Rachel was there it was like there was only one other person in the room. It was quite surreal."

Rachel was in charge of organising the day, which ran like clockwork. "It

was completely perfect," beams the 26-year-old. "Even better than I'd imagined."

Among the 140 guests were Rachel's *Countdown* colleagues Nick Hewer and Susie Dent, along with her former co-host Jeff Stelling.

"Of course, Rachel is one of the most beautiful women in England," says ex-*Apprentice* advisor Nick, who flew in for the day from his home in south-west France. "When you've got brains and beauty combined, then you've hit the jackpot – at least Mr Gilbert has."

For a person who is used to solving complex maths conundrums, it's perhaps no surprise that Rachel was a laidback bride.

"Friends beforehand were saying, 'You're going to lose weight with the worry, you won't be able to sleep or eat,' but we were fine," Rachel ▶

Kisses from her leading men, Nick and Jamie (all left). "Rachel is one of the most beautiful women in England," says Nick. Her husband says of his stunning bride, perfect in her off-the-shoulder Caroline Castiglioni gown and carrying a summer bouquet (right): "She looked amazing"





Ready, girls? Preparing in the bridal suite (above) for their grand entrance, Rachel's bridesmaids Siobhán Freel and Sarah Martin wear BCBG Max Azria gowns which match the sashes of flower girls Hannah and Eva De Rozario and Christina Froud, in frocks sourced online from the US. The bride's train is attached to the dress by a diamanté bow (left). Jamie took months to choose the diamond for Rachel's ring (below left)



laughs. So relaxed was Jamie, in fact, that he was still asleep five minutes before he was due for breakfast on the big day. He was woken by Rachel's mum Celia with a gift from his bride, a pair of cufflinks.

Rachel, meanwhile, slipped into her wedding finery – a gown by Caroline Castiglione with a veil from London vintage store Fur Coat No Knickers and Jimmy Choo shoes – in Hengrave Hall's bridal suite. Rachel had first spotted her silk duchesse satin gown online while in the *Countdown* canteen after Gloria Hunniford, a guest on the show, suggested the label.

Getting ready for her big day with her two bridesmaids as wedding tunes played in the background, it was all thoroughly relaxed.

"It was only when we were walking down the stairs to the ceremony that I got a bit nervous," Rachel says. "We were getting in position ready to make our entrance when my dad stood on my dress," she laughs. "So he kind of fell over."

Rachel's happiness was clear to see as, smiling broadly, she walked up the aisle of the Hall's Banqueting Hall to Johann Pachelbel's beautiful *Canon*. The room fell silent when she reached

'When you've got brains and beauty [as Rachel has], you've hit the jackpot'
Nick Hewer

Jamie's side, the reverential hush broken only by the sound of her Nan saying: "Oh, she looks lovely." "It was quite sweet," smiles Rachel.

The readings at the civil ceremony included an extract from Louis de Bernière's *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* – "Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away" – and *A Lovely Love Story* by Edward Monkton.

The couple exchanged rings by Essex jeweller Christopher J Vinten and Rachel's eyes brimmed with tears as she and Jamie were pronounced man and wife. "I had to really try to hold it in," she confesses.

After applause from their guests, the new Mr and Mrs Gilbert walked down the aisle in traditionally jubilant style to Mendelssohn's *The Wedding March*.

Hengrave Hall, where James II once attended a wedding, was chosen by the couple for their wedding venue, Rachel explains, because it was "about the same age as Oriel College Oxford, where Jamie and I met – they even have a bedroom called Oriel Chamber".

After the ceremony, guests mingled on the lawn of the Tudor mansion, which was bathed in scorching sunshine. And, as a nod to Rachel's heritage, Jamie followed the Jewish wedding custom of stamping on a glass.

FORMULA FOR A PERFECT DAY

Rachel had joked she had arranged the wedding around the football season so that both *Gillette Soccer Saturday* presenter Jeff Stelling and her father Chris, a Manchester United season ticket holder, could attend.

Jeff wouldn't have missed it for the world, however. "We started on *Countdown* at the same time, so we are sort of soulmates in that sense," he told **HELLO!**. "I still follow Rachel's progress and hopefully will throughout the year."

Susie Dent, who had brought daughters Lucy, 12, and Thea, four, to the wedding – where guests also included producers on the hit daytime TV show – said it was lovely to have the *Countdown* team reunited.

"It is such a cliché but we are a big family," she says. "*Countdown* is a very special show. Behind the scenes, the crew who make it have been there almost since the beginning and we're very tightly knit. It has a lovely vibe to it."

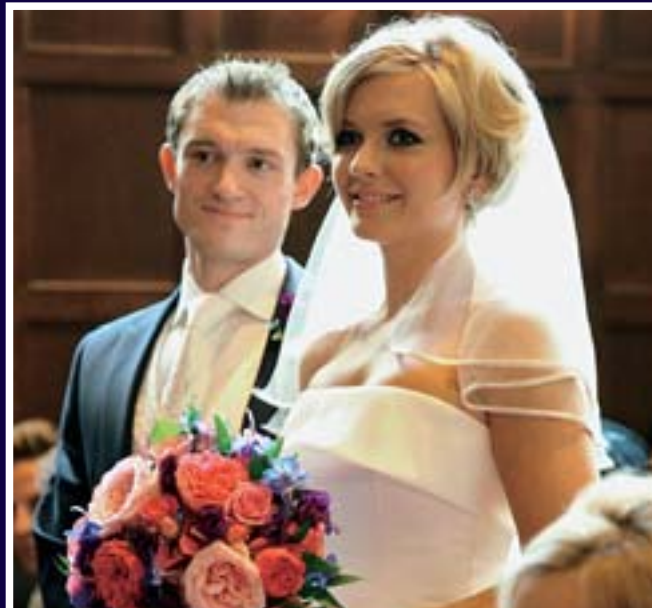
Nick Hewer added: "I'm the new boy and they've taken care of me. I've got two wonderful women in Mrs Gilbert and Susie Dent. I lead a charmed life."

After a three-course meal in the Long Gallery, Jamie gave his groom's speech in which he described first meeting his future wife. "I first spotted Rachel in a crowded college bar in 2004," he recalled. "I didn't get a chance to introduce myself until eight weeks later, at an end-of-term party."

Rachel had told **HELLO!** that she had had been "letting my hair down because it was the end of the first term and I'd worked really hard". ▶



The couple, who met at Oxford University in 2009, exchange rings under an archway of flowers (above). After being pronounced man and wife – and making it official (below right) – unflappable maths queen Rachel confesses that her emotions got the better of her. "I really had to try and hold it in," she admits



FLOWERS: JANICE AT FLOWERS WITH FLAIR



The newlyweds are showered with confetti by guests (above) and exchange smiles as Rachel's father Chris speaks lovingly of his talented daughter, "a maths geek and proud of it" (below left). "I feel privileged to have found a remarkably stunning bride to share my life with, *FHM*'s 84th sexiest woman," Jamie quipped in his touching speech. Cutting the cake, each layer a different flavour, its pink roses mirroring the bride's bouquet (below)



'The day was completely perfect, even better than I had imagined. We loved absolutely all of it'

The drinks were flowing but Jamie, then a fourth-year student, was sober as he's teetotal. He told guests he began a "scheming masterplan" to get her to go out with him. It clearly worked as four weeks later, he took Rachel to Mauritius.

He told the wedding party: "I can easily say the past seven and a half years have been the best years of my life.

"I feel privileged to have found a remarkably stunning bride to share my life with – *FHM's* 84th sexiest woman," he quipped.

Rachel's dad spoke lovingly of his daughter – "a maths geek and proud of it". He added fondly: "I've watched every *Countdown* numbers game since Rachel started, that's 2,448. Rachel has solved the numbers game when contestants have failed and she's done this over 700 times."

Jamie's mother Jenni, as well as Rachel's mum and aunt, had each independently given Rachel the *Countdown* application form before she took over from Carol Vorderman in 2009. When filming the show, Rachel stays in Manchester for three days at a time on alternate weeks.

"Jamie isn't fazed by anything," she tells **HELLO!**. "If he calls and I'm working, he doesn't bat an eyelid, which I think is pretty unique."

The couple broke up briefly in 2009. "It wasn't for very long," said Rachel, who met Jamie when she was 19. "It was just a split to take the pressure off. Once you leave university, things change.

"Things weren't going brilliantly between us so we needed to sort some stuff out by ourselves. But once we got back together, it was all good."

COUNTDOWN TO HAPPINESS

Jamie proposed around the time of Rachel's birthday in January 2011. "The diamond selection took me six to eight months. I researched every facet of diamond. That's probably why I haven't got too involved in organising this," he laughs. "I get very occupied with the details."

Marriage, they explain, was important to them both. "Between them, our parents have been married for more than 60 years," says Rachel, who had spent many a night staying up into the early hours to plan her special day. "I think the wedding details were as much a surprise to Jamie as they were to anyone," she says. "He requested steak for the meal and I think that's it."

"Rachel has set a precedent now," quips Jamie. "All organisation should be going her way."

However, Jamie did look as if he was prepared for the dance routine. When they took to the floor for their first dance, to *Can't Take My Eyes off of You*, it was clear that they'd practised the steps.

Rachel remained on the dancefloor for most of the night to the sounds of party band the Funtime Frankies. At 9pm, she kicked off her Jimmy Choos. "I was liberated, so I could really go for it on the dancefloor!"

Jeff Stelling was one of the last to leave. "Everyone loved him and wanted to say hello. He chatted to everyone," says Rachel, who carried on celebrating until midnight.

The next day, the newlyweds returned to their home in Thorpe Bay, Essex, to pack for their fortnight away.

While Rachel was in charge of the wedding, Jamie arranged the honeymoon and Rachel only found out where they were going – Hawaii – when they checked in at the airport.

"We've absolutely loved all of it," says Rachel of their big day. "And now I've got to get used to referring to 'my husband'." **H**

INTERVIEW: DAWN EMERY
PHOTOS: TONY WARD

HAIR & MAKE-UP: LOTTIE BROOKSBANK USING
CHANEL & PAUL MITCHELL



Jamie and Rachel enjoy their first dance as man and wife to *Can't Take My Eyes off of You* by Andy Williams (above). Later in the evening, Rachel kicked off her Jimmy Choos so she could "really go for it on the dancefloor" to the band Funtime Frankies. Right: the flower girls reach eagerly to catch the bride's bouquet. While Rachel arranged the "perfect" wedding, Jamie was in charge of their honeymoon – a surprise trip to Hawaii

