



Vincent Simone at Brooklands Museum, and with dance partner Flavia Cacace, right
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Boy racer

Quick with a quip and with a twinkle in his eye, Vincent Simone is Italian to the core. About to depart on a new dance tour, he finds time to charm **Fiona Adams** with talk of the loves of his life: the tango, fast cars and fame

Dancer Vincent Simone clearly loves being famous. The Italian-born partner of Flavia Cacace, he arrived in Surrey from Foggia in southern Italy in his teens and has steadily built on an 'Italian stallion' reputation, with a love of fast cars and an ability to make female fans swoon at his dance moves.

He readily admits that, even early on in his career, he had his eye on international stardom and all its trappings.

"I used to say that my dream was to walk down Guildford High Street and that people would scream and stop me for pictures and my autograph!" he laughs, with tongue in cheek and a twinkle in his eye. "Now a few million people know who I am. I love fame! What's not to love?"

His love affair with attention – and dancing – started almost simultaneously. The young Vincent accompanied his parents to a dance at the age of seven, and found that not only did he enjoy it, but that he had a talent. The flattery and compliments ensured a continued interest. He won his first competition at the age of 10 and began teaching aged 12. When he was 17, he came to England because it was "the centre of Ballroom dancing".

He and Flavia met at *Hurleys Dance School* in Guildford and they became partners soon after. They worked well together and went on to win national and world competitions. Recruited by *Strictly Come Dancing* in 2006, they have been firmly rooted in the hearts of the public –

and media headlines – ever since.

With his cheeky smile and flirtatious wit, Vincent has garnered a huge female fan base, which will no doubt form a large part of the audience for the couple's first solo tour, *Midnight Tango*. The show begins in Jersey this month, arrives at the *New Victoria Theatre*, Woking in May and – if things go well – will hit the West End next spring.

"We have done tours with other dancers, but we wanted to do our own thing," he says. "We are the only couple on *Strictly* who specialise in both ballroom and Latin, but as we're known for the Argentine Tango, that's what the show is based around. There's us, plus five Argentine couples, and the backdrop is a raunchy



Argentine bar. It's a beautiful set, with fantastic lighting and production."

No doubt being on primetime TV helps to combat performance nerves and up ticket sales, but even the confident 32-year-old confesses to feeling a little anxious nevertheless.

"We're on tour until July and performing at venues all over the country. I hope we will please Strictly fans as well as more serious dance lovers, but it's very scary: it's all about me and Flavia, and there's nowhere to hide!"

I am meeting Vincent at *Brooklands Museum* in Weybridge. With training and ticket sales going well, he is taking time off here at the birthplace of British motorsport to indulge his other aforementioned passion – fast cars – by becoming a custodian of a square yard of the original race track, which was built in 1907.

The scheme, known as *Banking on Brooklands*, helps raise funds for the museum and has proved popular with local supporters as well as celebrities, such as *Top Gear's* James May and Jeremy Clarkson, as well as Tiff Needle and Penelope Keith.

Off screen he is just as flirty and self-assured as when he is twirling the likes of Felicity Kendal around the dancefloor. He calls me *"bella"* so many times, it's as though I have unwittingly changed my name. Here indeed is the very embodiment of a silver-tongued lothario.

"Being Italian, I just love cars. It's in our blood – like good food and beautiful women! When I was at school, I spent all my time looking at cars. Italian weather is fantastic for driving and everyone's out on motorbikes too. I just couldn't wait to get my driving licence."

"My first car was a Lancia 2.3L. It was really fast, flashy, a nice colour and women loved it! But in Britain, all the money I earned went on dancing, so I was constantly looking in Autotrader for fast second-hand cars. I have had about four Honda Preludes – my first was black with big alloys. I love them!"

Clearly at home amongst the classic cars, Vincent talks with real feeling about *Brooklands* and glances round the exhibits – which range from early racing cars to *Concorde* – with an envious gleam in his eye.

"Brooklands is an amazing place. It's a piece of history and more people should know about it. Because of my job, I need a car with a bit more space – and not so flash," he sighs. *"While I'd love to own a Ferrari, I have to settle for a family car, as I have a little boy – my little Italian sausage roll..."*

And with that, the Italian stallion briefly becomes a pussycat.

"Ciao bella," he says. *"I'm sure we'll meet again."*

■ Midnight Tango Tour, 9–14 May, New Victoria Theatre, Woking. Tel 0870 060 6645 or visit www.vincentandflavia.com/bookings.html.

■ www.bankingonbrooklands.org.uk & www.brooklandsmuseum.com

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