



Easily Distracted

Steve Coogan

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Steve Coogan was born and raised in Manchester in the 1960s, the fourth of six children. From an early age he entertained his family with impressions and was often told he should 'be on the telly'. Failing to get into any of the London-based drama schools, he accepted a place at Manchester Polytechnic School of Theatre and before graduating had been given his first break as a voice artist on the satirical puppet show *Spitting Image*.

The late eighties and early nineties saw Coogan developing characters he could perform on the comedy circuit, from Ernest Moss to Paul Calf, and in 1992 he won a Perrier award with John Thomson. It was around the same time, while working with Armando Iannucci and Patrick Marber on *On The Hour* and *The Day Today*, that Alan Partridge emerged, almost fully formed.

Coogan, once a tabloid fixture, is now a respected film actor, writer and producer. He runs his own production company, Baby Cow, has a raft of films to his name (from *24 Hour Party People* to *Alpha Papa*, the critically-acclaimed Partridge film), six Baftas and seven Comedy Awards. He has found huge success in recent years with both *The Trip* and *Philomena*, the latter bringing him two Oscar nominations, for producing and co-writing.

In *Easily Distracted* he lifts the lid on the real Steve Coogan, writing with distinctive humour and an unexpected candour about a noisy childhood surrounded by foster kids, his attention-seeking teenage years and his emergence as a household name with the birth of Alan Partridge.

Easily Distracted Details

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From Reader Review Easily Distracted for online ebook

Gordon Doherty says

Everybody has a comedic touchstone - a stand-up or a sitcom they can go back to time and again and know just how easily it will tickle them and engage fond memories. Steve Coogan and his comic creations have seen me through my adolescence, my uni days, and my working life so far. Alan Partridge is - as for many Coogan fans - my ultimate comfort comedy; the one I can recite backwards. I can still laugh at his frantic and futile attempts to placate enraged farmers despite a thousand previous viewings.

Perhaps part of the challenge in appreciating *Easily Distracted* is in remembering that this is the autobiography of Steve Coogan and not one of his creations. Indeed, after I read it and put it on my bookshelf, my wife asked me to fetch it so she could have a read and - unconsciously - I picked up *I, Partridge*, instead. I could imagine Steve shaking a mock-angry fist at me for doing so, and at those who claim there is too much similarity between him and his comic characters (and between some of those creations). But this only strengthens a point Coogan tries to get across in telling his story - that there is a bit of Alan Partridge, Paul Calf, Gareth Cheeseman, Duncan Thickett and co in Steven Coogan and vice versa. It's not a secret, it's a fact - one he is happy to acknowledge and embrace. In *Easily Distracted*, Coogan does not try to paint a whiter-than-white image of himself; rather, he accepts himself for what he is, vices and virtues. He talks of his youthful, idealistic visions of his future self - unflappable, engaging and witty - but acknowledges the man he has become: a man who at times can exhibit all of these qualities and at other times none of them. It's quite a rational and balanced stance and one that is not hard to empathise with; it certainly helped me as a reader to understand a little bit more about the man behind the comic mask.

The book - slightly unconventionally for an autobiography - starts with the here and now, the recent times of the Coogan we think we know: the darkness of the Leveson inquiry, the exhausting realities behind the Partridge movie and his pride at the BAFTA-winning *Philomena* (an excellent demonstration of his abilities as a straight actor). It then settles into a more typical chronological account of his life, delivered in an enjoyably raconteurial rhetoric: from his sepia-tinted memories of boyhood holidays in Ireland (I challenge any child of the 50s, 60s or 70s to read this without drifting off to memories of their own holidays of this ilk) and life in his somewhat eccentric family home, to his struggles to break into comedy and acting, then on to the stellar rise that followed... and the well-documented baggage that came with it. It's an engaging and fulfilling journey, though I suspect - and respect - that Steve hasn't given us absolutely everything (who would?)

Being such a fan of his comedy, there was a big part of me looking for in-gags in each paragraph, but that's not what this book is about. It does have gags and it did have me chuckling away. But he makes it clear that straight comedy doesn't quite cut it for him any more. That said, there are a few Easter eggs in there, such as page 201 when he refers to that excellent James Bond movie 'To Russia With Love' (To Russia? Stop getting Bond wrong!).

Easily Distracted works well in doing what I think it set out to achieve: presenting Steve Coogan, as he is, without apology. An entertaining, at times gritty and at times warm, and consistently thought-provoking read.

Originally posted on: <http://www.gordondoherty.co.uk/review...>

Ellen says

I "read" the audiobook version and I highly recommend it. What makes Steve Coogan such a treasure is his ability to do characters and accents - each one its own unique person. I can't imagine getting even close to the full effect by reading it since every quote and character has a voice of its own in his reading of it. Great story, will listen again soon!

Ben Baker says

A bizarrely structured book that really comes to life when describing his pre-fame years, the exact opposite of what I was expecting. Has any other autobiography ever mentioned Richard Herring and Saturday Zoo as much?

Nick Davies says

Bought for me as a present, this was more engaging than expected - I do like Steve Coogan's work, but didn't previously have a particular opinion of the man himself. This however read as one of the better 'comedian's autobiography' books I have read - Coogan's style is understated, charming, witty and self-aware. Quite a lot about his childhood and early professional life (which is as I like it - too much 'post success' content often comes over in an autobiography as name-droppy) and a sensible and honest sense of introspection about his lower-middle class Catholic upbringing and life too. The choice not to format the book in a strict chronological manner was also an added plus - it hence didn't feel weighed down by inevitability or 'fade out' towards the current day either IMHO. An enjoyable read.

Mary Grand says

I enjoyed this book initially but lost interest about a third of the way through. It seems to jump around a lot, i feel it needs sorting out! Shame because I like Steve Coogan but I was disappointed with this.

TIM HERRING says

An easy and enjoyable book to read although not a wow book. I enjoyed the chapters on Philomena and the Trip. The chapters on his childhood and growing up in Manchester were easy to relate to and he deals well with the seemingly easy passage to success he had via Spitting Image and then Alan Partridge. He does refer to drug and alcohol abuse but quite a long period after the success of Partridge is hardly covered at all. I wonder if a biography would be more revealing than this auto biography

Hannah Cook says

Maybe more like 3.5 stars. It ends just as he's created Knowing Me Knowing You with Alan Partridge! I wanted more stories from later Alan.

Liked: memories of his childhood, 90s stuff and anything about Alan.

Dislike: a bit all over the place and not chronological, no mention of how he knew my old co-worker.

UPDATE: forgot to say dislike was casual racism and sexism. he'd probably deny it and describe himself as a liberal, but he's a bit old school in his attitudes.

I hope there's a sequel.

Clare Howard says

Just what you'd expect. Straight talking, bit arrogant in a loveable way. Funny. Nice bloke, great read.

Steve says

I was so excited to start this (Coogan reads Coogan, how could it fail!) but it's probably the worst introduction I could've had to audiobooks. An aimless, plodding wank of an autobiography read entirely in monotone. Hugely disappointing.

Dave Bronze says

So I don't get the bad reviews of this book. I get we're all entitled to an opinion, but you're wrong (sounds better if read as Alan) Seriously though I really enjoyed it. I loved reading about his childhood and the birth of Alan. Yes, he's over confident at times but in fairness that's the appeal to me. If you're looking for an Alan autobiography try I, Partridge (which is the better book!) but if you're wanting to read about Steve, not Alan, this is a great book.

Keen says

“I’ve travelled a lot around America, but I’ve never seen a bumper sticker that says, ‘I love nuance.’ Is surely worthy of a bumper sticker itself.

Coogan comes across as an affable, humble and ultimately likeable enough character. He is never afraid to laugh at or mock himself, he readily credits and praises others when due, and is happy to open up about his many flaws and shortcomings that have caused him and others various problems over the years.

“There remains a huge problem with equality of opportunity in this country. There are, without doubt, privileged, privately educated kids who are incredibly talented, but it is also beyond doubt that anyone from such a background is going to find it easier to get into the world of acting than those who go through the state system. The odds are stacked against you if you come from a modest background; you need exponentially more talent and determination to make it. If you are moderately talented and very privileged,

you'll find it easier. It's just a mathematical paradigm."

He says when summing up his thoughts on the British class system. Like his parents he regards himself as liberal. He is frank yet sensitive about his views on Catholicism, the religion in which he was brought up with. "My mum cites that as the existence of God, because I have lots of classics now. I disagree. God exacts a tsunami on the innocent and gives me two Aston Martins. As divine justice goes, it strikes me as a bit unfair." Coogan also speaks well about his appalling treatment at the hand of the British tabloids and News International, which he knocked back an out of court settlement and went onto successfully sue "News of The World". He then went onto play his part in the Leveson Inquiry.

As well as class, religion, politics and his love of cars, he also talks about comedy and acting, in particular he talks of the influence, friendship and help he has enjoyed over the years, from the likes of Armando Iannucci, John Thomson, Frank Skinner and many others. Like Skinner's autobiography he chooses not to open up too much about his drink problems, instead what we get are a few pages tagged on at the end in the penultimate chapter, which leave many more questions than answers. That was understandable in a way, but also disappointing in another. The sequence of events does tend to jump around a little too, which can be annoying.

This is an undemanding and entertaining biography. Granted there are no shocking revelations or profound insights. We do learn that he seems to come from a very stable background with loving, generous and tolerant parents. But although lacking shock value, it doesn't mean there is an absence of value. In spite of him repeatedly playing down his own intellectual abilities, he is clearly a smart enough man and Coogan makes a number of really good points on many interesting subjects and although not a great read, this was certainly an enjoyable one from a highly talented and amusing man.

Sam says

Having had a lifelong admiration for the writings and the intellect of Mr Coogan, I had high hopes for his autobiography. Clearly a man of great intelligence and wit I would have assumed this would be the makings of a well written and humourous autobiography, like that of Tina Fey.

I watched a program once about the making of Father Ted where Graham Linehan and Steve Coogan touched on when Ted and Alan Partridge were being created in the same building at the same time and had hoped that anecdotes like this would come of Steve Coogan's autobiography. Wrong.

What you actually get is a lot from Steve's past, a rather indulgent few chapters about Philomena (a project that he is clearly extremely proud of), talk of Alpha Papa (i.e what it could have been, how well it fared, an amusing story about how hard it was to dress Alan in a fashion that wasn't cool amongst hipsters), musings about The Trip, and then some poly filler stories in between. Just as Steve gets to mentioning Alan Partridge you realise that you're now holding a slender part of the book, that turns out to be a couple of pages and then the "Steve Coogan Index". Perhaps I was being naive in thinking he wouldn't save this for a second book or maybe it was Steve having the last laugh when he denies readers what they've ultimately been reading for but I have to say I was a little disappointed. Oh, he also manages to cram in a brief chapter about his drug use into this slender end of the book as well, in case you thought you were going to get any tales about that either, you'll just be left flicking back through wondering if you accidentally skipped any pages.

If and when Steve Coogan does release his second book, it will be with a heavy heart that I hand over my money at the counter. Firstly, because I dread a whole few chapters on, let's say, his cameo in Tropic

Thunder (anything to delay talking about Partridge) and secondly, because I had bought the first one with such enthusiasm to be let down by a deliberate ploy.

Side note: Yes, you can by I, Partridge if you like reading about Alan Partridge but there are those who are also interested in the creative process - although agreed: it is an amazingly funny book.

Garry Middleton says

Very dull and repetitive.

I did not really enjoy this, which is a pity because I was really looking forward to it. If I had to read once more how 'nuanced' something was, I would have smashed my kindle. Every chapter had a nuance or nuanced in it!!! I felt like this book was a word count, it ended very abruptly, so much so that I thought it was a glitch, but no it really was the end. Have to say I was quite glad.

Helen Driver says

Awful, just awful. I wrote a full review on my blog here: <https://readafinething.wordpress.com/...>

Suzie says

2 1/2 stars. I'm still not quite sure how I feel about this book. It started slowly and took a while to get "his voice" and I wonder whether that's the ghostwriter aspect. There's a lot about his family, which I really enjoyed, and lots about his major characters, but the timeline jumped around and I found it difficult to follow at times. It ended quite abruptly. but it seemed there was much more to say. I'm a fan so I did get something out of it, but it wasn't what I expected
