

DOUBLE TAKE



Media buyer **Jason Veale** (left) and photographer/writer **Jason Kimberley**, both 40, have remained best of mates since school. They talk to *Drew Warne-Smith*.

JASON K: Jase says I'm the brains and he's the brawn; I have the ideas and he does the heavy lifting. It's a great relationship that way; there's never any argument about who does what.

We've been mates since school, at Brighton Grammar [Melbourne]. Like a lot of young blokes we shared a common interest in making a fast buck. Our first venture was as abalone poachers at Beaumaris. We cut a deal with the local Chinese restaurant to sell them abalone at \$8 a kilo. I still remember sitting out the front with our bikes and a huge bag of dim sims, waiting for our money. We thought we'd absolutely made it.

It was really our love of the outdoors that made us friends. We'd go diving and camping and spend weekends at Jase's family's farm near Mt Baw Baw. In our early 20s we drove around Australia in a beaten-up old LandCruiser; we've also done a canoe trip down the Amazon and we still go pig hunting up north every couple of years.

Our most recent trip was to Antarctica with Peter Hillary [son of Sir Edmund]. I'd climbed with Pete before, so he led the three of us on an old-fashioned explorers' trek: strapping on our skis and hauling a sled. Peter is a world-renowned explorer but I think he realised pretty early on that Jase is, well, not.

I've done some major mountaineering trips but most of Jase's experience comes from the Discovery Channel.

On a training camp at Falls Creek Jase managed to break Pete's prized extender [a clamp for climbing rope], which he'd taken up Everest. He got stuck with a harness squashing

his nuts so he just sheared the extender off with brute force. Then in Antarctica Jase put his shovel through the tent and broke all sorts of stuff, and Pete would just sit there shaking his head in bewilderment.

Jase's dad still keeps a box of "unbreakable" things Jase has busted over the years. He's probably owned 20 boats in his life and sunk 15. He can be a clumsy man, prone to accident. But he understands that completely, and it makes him a bit jittery. Like when Peter led us into a crevasse field, this maze of hard ice and soft snow-bridges. I had a near miss when a bridge collapsed, and Jase starts yelling out, "We said if anyone was unhappy to speak up, well I'm f.cking speaking up! Let's get out of here!"

To give him his due, he's as strong as an ox, he goes all day, and twice he led us out of a whiteout. He's in Sydney these days and I'm in Melbourne, so we don't see each other as often as we'd like. But being in Antarctica reaffirmed everything I knew about him. He's committed, enthusiastic, and he makes light of any situation, the master of the understatement. He's so honest, too, with himself and me. And he's such a good sport.

I asked him to pose for some nude photographs one day – I figured that it'd make a great juxtaposition, a naked body on ice. He was happy to oblige. He just asked me to avoid highlighting the inevitable shrinkage. I don't think I've laughed more than seeing the big fella nude dashing around in the snow at -15°C . And as it turned out, it made a pretty striking cover for my new book *Antarctica – A Different Adventure*.

JASON V: Ah yes, my infamous "dead hand". That's what Dad called it – my ability to break things. I used to dispute it but there's too much proof. Like my sister's Walkman. I borrowed it while running near the beach. Inevitably the salt water infiltrated it and it was stuffed. And yes, I broke Peter Hillary's gear, and yes, I put the bloody shovel through the fly of the tent. But it was -20°C outside and all I wanted to do was get the camp ready and get inside.

The thing with Jase, he can be reckless, too. He's always been smart – at school he loved playing the goody-goody, manipulating teachers with his charm – but he doesn't mind defying common sense. He was leading us in Antarctica one day and he decided to push on ahead towards this beautiful minaret without checking. We were exhausted, it was late, we were staggered too far apart, and there were massive wind blasts. He must have thought he was Robert Scott, and we could have met the same fate. I had to catch him and tell him to turn around. Didn't he get a roast from the Peter! It's always amusing when the great Jason Kimberley stuffs up.

He's an interesting character, Jase. **He's good at a lot of stuff; a jack of all trades. And he's deceptively tough. He's got a small motor but a long-range fuel tank, and there's a turbo there too** when he needs it, while I'm more a lumbering truck, a road train. I just keep on going. But to be honest I think he is still searching for what he was put on the planet to do. To a degree that's what these trips have been about over the years: it's him honing his skills and refining his interests and searching for his place in the world. And I just sort of tag along.

Jase needs to be passionate about what he does. He's created lots of opportunities, but he's never settled on one of them. And I've always had monumental respect for him because of that. As the son of Craig Kimberley [founder of Just Jeans] he never said, "Yep, okay Dad, my career will be to follow you." He makes his own decisions. Even in the way he dresses, he's a total eccentric. He's just a non-conformist.

He doesn't judge anyone else for their decisions, either. I really value that. We've got similar outlooks on life and we can be in a tent for weeks together and we just get on, no problems. We know each other's strengths and weaknesses. That takes a special friendship, I reckon, even if it means putting up with him blowing out his big farts.

I've been thinking for our next trip we'll go to Alaska and I'll suggest I do the planning. I'm not exactly a details guy. Jase would be like, "Hang on, what are your contingency plans?" I'm not sure he'd let me do it, actually. Probably a good thing, too. ☉