

# Ray's flame burns bright

He's one of TV's best-known faces but at home in Milsons Point, Ray Meagher is 'ho hum'

By Caroline Jumpertz

**R**ay Meagher is one of Australia's best known faces, thanks to his long-running role as Alf Stewart on television's *Home & Away* but in his neighbourhood of Milsons Point he's just one of the locals.

"Around here, and I've lived here for nearly 20 years, you don't get [approached] very much at all," he says, over a coffee at his favourite local spot, Cafe Pompidou, on the appropriately named Alfred St. "Once you go to places on a regular, or semi-regular basis, people just go 'ho-hum', and that's terrific."

Away from the set where the 73-year-old still spends a significant amount of his time, Meagher likes to spin a yarn, have a laugh, and if it's later in the day, enjoy a glass of "something nice". Meagher lives in his suburb of Milsons Point, where he's lived in the same unit for



Ray Meagher's Alf Stewart is local TV's longest running character.

two decades, and which he shares with his wife Gilly. The couple married in 2010, which was the same year Meagher won the Gold Logie for most popular personality on Australian Television.

Earlier this year, he was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia, or OAM, for his work in the performing arts.

Rather than Milsons Point, it is Sydney's far northern outpost of Palm Beach, or Summer Bay as it's known on *Home & Away*, that Meagher is best associated with.



Ray Meagher looking a million miles from his famous character Alf Stewart on the Logies red carpet (above), with the coveted 2010 award (below left) and with wife Gilly (below right). Right: on the Palm Beach set of *Home & Away*, which is celebrating its 30th year on air at the end of 2017.



The veteran actor has been playing Alf "stone the flamin' crows" Stewart since the show's pilot episode, filmed in 1987. The series has aired since 1988, making the end of this year its 30th birthday.

"How many times have I said 'flamin' this morning?'" Meagher responds, when asked how close he is to Alf. The answer is none.

"That's a little key. I suppose."

"Obviously there's a lot of me in Alf," he continues, "I think there's a lot of most people in the characters they play, but some actors put their fists to their foreheads and say 'I'm an actor darling, I can play anything!'"

It's clear Meagher doesn't subscribe to this view and sees himself as highly practical when approaching his craft of many decades.

"If all acting is 100 per cent," he begins, drawing a

circle in the air, "Then most pretty good actors can play about that much of the circle really well." His two hands indicate a pizza slice-sized part of the circle, to show the zone. "I don't think anybody can play everything. I think there's always someone that can play it better than you, the further you get away from your core."

Within his core range, however, Meagher has played his share of diverse character roles.

Early on, he had parts in iconic Australian movies such as *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, *My Brilliant Career* and *Breaker Morant*. On TV, he's been seen in *Number 96*, *Prisoner*, *A Country Practice*, *Kingswood Country*, and for nearly 30 years, *Home & Away*.

Meagher grew up on a Queensland cattle and sheep station, went to boarding school in Brisbane and, in

his teens, found he was good at rugby. So good, in fact, that he played in the first ever first grade game at Ballymore Stadium. He was recently invited back to Queensland for a 50th anniversary of that historic game and he remains very tribal about the Queensland

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Reds in the Super Rugby.

In 1973, following a stint in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast with a theatre restaurant production called *Dinabol*, Meagher moved to Sydney with the show. He's been in Sydney, and in work, ever since.

He's in awe of the hard work that's kept the production of *Home & Away* going for almost three decades.

"We're an easy show to take cheap shots at," he says, noting that many who started on *Home & Away*

have gone on to global fame, including Guy Pearce, Isla Fisher, Chris Hemsworth, Naomi Watts, and Tammin Sursok.

"We make two films every week, in screen time, to give you some idea of the pressure," says Meagher.

He's the only original actor still on the show and longest continuing performer in a role on Australian television, but Meagher doesn't keep close track of the industry these days, despite being grateful for his role in it.

"When you're doing a long running series, you've got your head down at your backside up, and you're mainly concerned with what you're doing tomorrow."

"But for every job, and for every hungry actor, there's probably another 100 who didn't get it who would have done just as good a job. Winning the audition is a lot

harder than anything else."

Most days, shooting schedule permitting, Meagher spends an hour on a morning walk around his neighbourhood, then he gets dressed for work in his signature a striped shirt, jeans and RM Williams boots.

On set, he gets dressed again, in Alf Stewart's clothing, and becomes Australian television's longest lived character.

Of an evening, you'll find Meagher at his much-loved local seafood restaurant Garfish, or perhaps at home watching *600 Words*, or *Doctor, Doctor*, his two favourite shows.

"When you're doing two and a half hours of television a week, and you've got a big week, the last thing you want to do when you get home is go somewhere. You want to go home and have a glass of something nice, or watch a bit of telly."