

= Lead Balloon =

Lead Balloon is a British television series produced by Open Mike Productions for BBC Four . The series was created and is co @-@ written by comedian Jack Dee and Pete Sinclair . It stars Dee as Rick Spleen (Formally Rick Shaw) , a cynical and misanthropic comedian whose life is plagued by petty annoyances , disappointments and embarrassments . Raquel Cassidy , Sean Power and Tony Gardner also star . The first series of six episodes was broadcast on BBC Four in 2006 , with the first episode achieving the highest ratings for a comedy on the channel . Repeats of the series were run on BBC Two and BBC HD , bringing it to a larger audience . The second series of eight episodes aired on BBC Two from November 2007 ; the third series aired from November 2008 ; and the final series aired from 31 May 2011 until 5 July .

Comparisons were made by critics to the successful American comedy Curb Your Enthusiasm , and positive comments were made about Lead Balloon 's characters , particularly Magda , the Eastern European housekeeper . The first series was released on DVD in November 2007 . The show 's theme tune is a cover version of " One Way Road " , written by Noel Gallagher and performed by Paul Weller .

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

The genesis of the series came towards the end of recording the 2005 series of Jack Dee Live at the Apollo , when Dee speculated as to whether his experiences of " witless " interviews could be turned into a television programme . Following a meeting with his agent , in which he turned down the lead role in a series , Dee began writing the character that would become Rick Spleen . He focused the writing on Spleen 's domestic life , rather than his professional , but did highlight the clash between the two . A pilot , commissioned by BBC Four and recorded in December 2005 , received positive feedback and led to a full series of six 30 @-@ minute episodes being ordered in January 2006 for broadcast later in the year .

= = = Writing = = =

Dee 's frequent collaborator Pete Sinclair joined him to write the pilot script . The two worked for two weeks developing the characters and forming storylines from them , which prepared them for writing the series proper when it was commissioned . The two were strongly influenced in their writing by the " paradigm shift " of The Office that made " natural conversation " funny without a studio audience being present . Dee cites the early films of Woody Allen , Seinfeld and Curb Your Enthusiasm as other " cultural influences " that helped set the tone of the series . Controller of BBC Four Janice Hadlow stated the series was in the " same ballpark " as Curb , though it is not quite as autobiographical . The name Lead Balloon comes from the expression " To go down like a lead balloon " , meaning to be received badly by an audience .

= = = Filming = = =

The never @-@ broadcast pilot features a scene with Omid Djalili as a dry cleaner , which was reused in the fifth episode , " Pistachio " . Location filming for the first two series , particularly Rick and Mel 's house , was done in Willesden . Michael 's cafe used Gracelands Cafe in Kensal Green for the first two series , and Hugo 's restaurant in Lonsdale Road , Queen 's Park , London for the third . Most moped shots in the third series were filmed in Ladbroke Grove . Scenes are separated by the insertion of a person writing ideas for comedy material on a writing pad .

= = Characters = =

Dee 's character Rick Spleen (born Richard Shaw) is a stand @-@ up comedian living in London who struggles to get decent gigs and makes ends meet by hosting corporate events such as the Frozen Goods Awards Evening . Dee and Sinclair based the character on the " comedians who hated being comedians " who performed alongside Dee in his early years of stand @-@ up . Rick is a habitual and incompetent liar who often attempts practical tasks himself in an attempt to avoid paying professionals .

His partner Mel (Raquel Cassidy) is a talent agent whose clientele of everyday people getting their 15 minutes of fame serves to highlight Rick 's failing career . Her calm , perceptive and considerate personality contrasts strongly with Rick 's .

Rick 's American co @-@ writer , Marty (Sean Power) , writes the majority of Rick 's material , often working with him at Rick 's home or Michael 's café . Though he tries to moderate Rick 's desperate behaviour , he is quietly frustrated with him , and conspires against Rick 's interests .

Michael (Tony Gardner) owns and runs the café that Rick and Marty frequently visit to escape the chaos of Rick 's home . He is socially awkward , possibly to the extent of having a mental disorder , although he was actually a high @-@ flying city banker who suffered from burn @-@ out . His father turns out to be gay in later series , to which Michael reacts negatively .

Rick 's daughter Sam (Antonia Campbell @-@ Hughes) attends sixth form college and regularly extracts money from her father , often by expressing sympathy at his misfortunes . This money is always around forty pounds , and is possibly being used for the purchase of recreational drugs .

Sam 's slacker boyfriend Ben (Rasmus Hardiker) goes through numerous jobs and interests in the first series , such as taking a circus skills course , and a short @-@ lived shelf @-@ stacking job , however these apparent jobs require a recurring amount of forty pounds (which is gained from Rick through Sam 's pleas) , which may in fact be used to purchase recreational drugs , meaning the jobs and interests may not exist at all .

Magda (Anna Crilly) is the Spleens ' morose Eastern European housekeeper , who is often puzzled by British attitudes , language and , in her view , softness . She is a willing worker and generally suffers Rick 's selfish eccentricities in sullen silence .

Neighbour Clive (John Biggins) had a part in a single scene in the first series , but had a larger part in an episode of the second series ; by the third series he had become a prominent character , concerned about the well @-@ being of his elderly mother who is very delicate and has had problems with losing her cat and having teenagers throwing rubbish over her wall .

= = Episodes = =

= = Reception = =

Immediately following the commission of the series , reviewers compared it to Curb Your Enthusiasm ; a story in The Independent ran with the headline " Dee writes BBC 's answer to Curb Your Enthusiasm " . The Stage 's Mark Wright called it " a curious oddity " and called comparisons to Curb " inevitable " . Ian Johns of The Times " obsessed " over the similarities to Curb , though singled out Crilly and Gardner for their performances , and described Dee 's characterisation of Rick as " turning childish pettiness into something almost endearing " .

A. A. Gill , in The Sunday Times , wryly praised the style of humour and the reaction it provoked in viewers . Hermione Eyre of The Independent on Sunday called it " a delectable comedy of everyday embarrassment " , but " unfortunately , Lead Balloon shows awkward joints where Curb Your Enthusiasm has invisible seams " ; the reviewer cited Larry David as being a good man driven to obnoxious behaviour , whereas Spleen is just obnoxious . Thomas Sutcliffe of The Independent named the series the best new comedy of 2006 .

When appearing on a panel of comedy judges at the 2007 Edinburgh International Television Festival , Frank Skinner , in response to The Vicar of Dibley and The Catherine Tate Show being voted the best comedies in a public poll , called it " the best sitcom that anyone from the comedy

circuit has done [...] Obviously I was hoping it would be shit " (Skinner starred in his own failed sitcom , Shane in 2004) .

The first episode broke BBC Four 's audience record for a comedy series , with 383 @, @ 000 viewers . Despite dropping to 199 @, @ 000 by the third episode , it still won a multi @- @ channel slot . " Rubbish " ' s BBC Two repeat received 2 @. @ 1 million viewers , with 122 @, @ 000 seeing " Allergic " afterwards on BBC Four . The final episode of the first series , " Fatty " , received 2 @. @ 3 million for its BBC Two repeat .

The first series was nominated for a British Comedy Award in 2007 , with Dee also nominated for best comedy actor .

= = Series information = =

= = = Broadcast history = = =

The first series aired on BBC Four between 4 October and 8 November 2006 in the 10 : 30 p.m. timeslot . The ratings success of the first episodes led to the series having a repeat run on BBC Two , starting on 26 October . A second series of eight episodes was commissioned by the controller of BBC Two following the conclusion of the first series . The third series began on 13 November 2008 . The fourth series premiered on BBC 2 on 31 May 2011 .

Lead Balloon was the first comedy series to be broadcast on the BBC 's high @- @ definition service , BBC HD , with another repeat run beginning on 21 December 2006 . Episodes were also made available as streaming downloads on bbc.co.uk during the first series run .

Jack Dee announced during an interview on Alan Carr : Chatty Man that a fourth series was in the works . Shooting finished in autumn 2010 and the series began its broadcast run on 31 May 2011 in the UK on BBC2 at 10pm .

In Australia , series one and two were first aired back @- @ to @- @ back on ABC1 each Tuesday at 8pm from 3 February 2009 until 7 April when the network shifted the remaining episodes to the later 9 : 30pm slot until 5 May 2009 . Both seasons have since been repeated on the lower @- @ rated ABC2 channel and uploaded to the ABC iView catch @- @ up service . Series three is yet to air in Australia .

In Sweden , series two was aired on SVT1 from the ninth of July 2012 : Series 3 and 4 were aired in the Autumn of the same year .

= = = DVD releases = = =

The first series was released on DVD on 12 November 2007 and the second on 24 November 2008 . The third and fourth series were released on 6 June 2011 and 11 July 2011 respectively . All 4 series were also released as a DVD boxset on 11 July 2011 .