

Ann Widdecombe

From politics to polka, alumna Ann Widdecombe is learning to dance from scratch on hit BBC television series *Strictly Come Dancing*.



Ex-Conservative MP turned author and television presenter Ann finally agreed to appear in the series this year after being asked repeatedly to join the cast.

'I refused year after year but then two things happened,' says Ann (BA Latin, 1969). 'I saw John Sergeant on the 2008 series and realised that you could actually do things at your own pace and not have to reach a semi-professional standard, which I hadn't believed until then. And I retired from politics so it became less risky both in terms of my career and my dignity.'

Ann admits she hasn't danced since she was a teenager and describes that brief dalliance as 'a disaster'. The 63-year-old is paired with Anton du Beke, one of the few pro dancers remaining from the original series and a viewers' favourite. 'I like Anton tremendously,' Ann says, 'but I've never met anyone who doesn't. For the first programme, he helped me literally to learn the waltz from scratch but we had great fun with it.'

Much of the series' early press coverage centred around Ann and her refusal to wear 'skimpy' costumes or perform dances she deems sexy or provocative. She says: 'I've made it clear from the outset that I'm not doing anything I don't want to do. I will either perform ballroom dances or a reinterpretation of Latin dances and I will wear full-length dresses or beautiful ballroom trousers but I will always be covered from my neck to my feet.'

So who, from fellow competitors including Destiny's Child singer Michelle Williams, magician Paul Daniels and actress Felicity Kendall, does Ann think is her biggest competition? 'Just about anyone,' she says. 'But I'm only training four or five hours a day, which is half the regime some of the others are doing and as much as I am prepared to do.'

'If I do stay in the competition, we will only have one week to learn the dances but I'm undaunted by that. Ultimately I'm doing this to have fun and so far, I really am.'