

TV PRESENTER JOE O'SHEA ON BEING CAUGHT DRINK DRIVING THE MORNING AFTER

The minute I rolled up to the checkpoint I knew I was over the limit... I'm so ashamed

AS ONE of the few fresh faces on RTE television, he's on our screens on a daily basis.

But it was his appearance in a district court that prompted the less glamorous half of Seoirge And O'Shea to take to the airwaves yesterday and speak of his shame at his conviction for drink driving.

Former tabloid journalist Joe O'Shea was stopped by gardai the morning after the Electric Picnic rock festival in Co. Laois last September - just six weeks after the introduction of random breath testing.

Having attended the event to write a newspaper article, Gráinne Seoige's onscreen partner met up with friends and then partied the night away.

The following morning, after a few hours' sleep in a tent, he decided to head back to Dublin by car.

But just one mile up the road he was stopped at a Garda checkpoint where he was breath-tested.

The breathalyser registered a reading of 58 micrograms of alcohol per 100ml - 23 micrograms over the legal limit.

Four months on, at Portlaoise District Court, O'Shea was banned from driving for a year. He was also fined and had his driving licence endorsed.

Yesterday the 36-year-old Corkman, said: 'I'm very embarrassed about the whole thing. I'm more than embarrassed; I'm ashamed about it, to tell you the truth.'

'But it was my fault, and I have to face the consequences and have to deal with it. I can only apologise. I should not have been driving at all.'

As politicians and publicans criticised the Garda policy of testing motorists on their way to work, the former tabloid journalist urged listeners to the Pat Kenny Show on RTE Radio One not to make the same mistake as him.

'If they [the public] want to look at me as a role model, the message from the role model is, "Don't make the same mistake as I did and think about it the next morning."

'I'm not preaching from the mountain top here, but it's something people need to be aware of.'

Recalling how events unfolded in the lead-up to being stopped by gardai on September 4 last, he admitted: 'Obviously I drank too much and stayed up too late.'

'The next morning I got a message, "Can you do something." I was working as a freelance journalist at the time. It wasn't urgent but I decided, what the hell, I'll just jump into the car and I'll drive to

By **Kate Chambré**

Dublin.' Confessing that he was ashamed of his actions, he yesterday admitted this decision was a 'serious error' of judgment.

'If I'd stopped to think about it - and I should have - then I would have realised that I probably was over the limit.'

'But it was just sort of like, "Ah sure, I'll take it easy on the roads, I'm by myself in the car, I'll cruise up to Dublin and I'll be fine".'

Yesterday he told the Pat Kenny Show: 'It was the first time I'd ever blown into a breathalyser. The minute I rolled up to the checkpoint I was like, "Right, I'm probably over the limit here..."'

'In the pit of my stomach, I knew. I had no tax on the car either actually. So it was a double whammy. The tax was out of date.'

After being charged with drink driving, O'Shea left his car at the Garda station and caught a train back to Dublin.

Asked whether he was the type of

'Obviously I drank too much'

person who would have taken a chance, he said: 'It's just something I was never in the habit of doing.'

'And I would always be the noller-than-thou guy in the pub, if a friend of mine had the keys, saying, "Leave the car there you shouldn't be driving, get a taxi with me."

'So it just goes to show that you can still make mistakes, no matter how wise you think you are.'

And he criticised those who take issue with early-morning breath testing - insisting: 'I have to say I don't think it's unfair.'

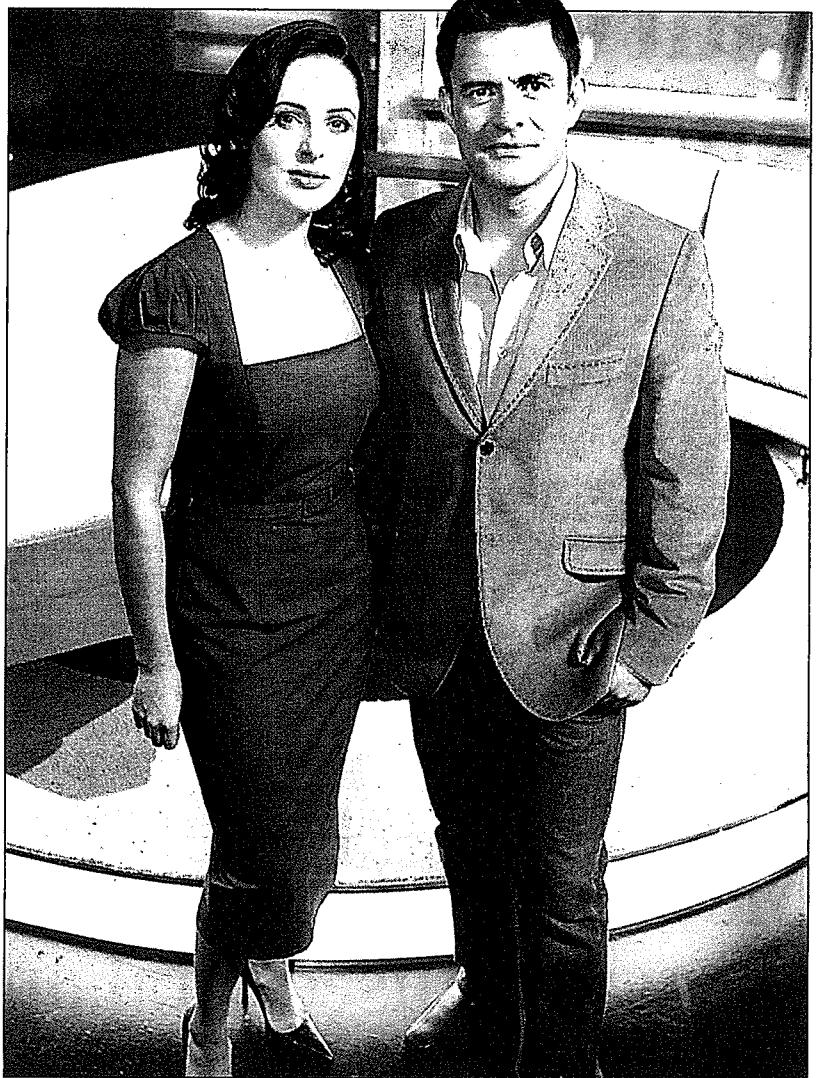
'If you are over the limit you are over the limit and that's it. I can say that sounding all pious, because I did break the law.'

He also said he was considering undergoing a drug and alcohol awareness programme and taking a road safety course in order to get his licence back sooner.

'That's something I've got to think about if I want to go back on the road earlier,' he said.

Of his year-long road ban, the former newspaperman took a philosophical view.

'I live in the centre of Dublin, so it is not a problem. I'll buy a bicycle,' he said. 'And you know the way the traffic is going in Dublin... I don't want to be flippant, but maybe it's not such a bad thing. I'll probably get to work faster in the mornings.'



'Don't make the same mistake,' cautions Joe, pictured here with television co-host Gráinne Seoige

How can you tell if you're too drunk to drive the next day?

THE legal limit in Ireland is 80 micrograms of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood.

It is the amount of alcohol in your bloodstream, not how many glasses of wine or pints of beer you have had that is measured in a breathalyser.

It is very hard to specify exactly how many drinks take you over the limit because the ratio of alcohol to blood varies from person to person depending on your sex, your size and how much food you've eaten.

But to be over the limit you generally need to have consumed five units of alcohol if you are a man, and a maximum of three units if you are a woman. A pint of lager contains about 2.5 units of alcohol, a large

glass of wine contains three units of alcohol, a small sherry one, a glass of champagne one-and-a-half and a bottle of premium lager two.

It takes at least an hour for the body to process just one unit of alcohol.

So if you have had three pints of beer it will take your body six hours to shift it.

If someone had drunk a bottle of wine (containing 10.5 units on average) at 11pm, then by 7am women in particular could still be over the drink drive limit with around three units of alcohol left in their system.

At this level, people's co-ordination and reaction times are affected and they are five times more likely to have an accident

than before they had a drink. Even by 10am they would still have traces of the previous night's alcohol in their system.

The speed at which alcohol is processed varies.

Eating a meal slows down the speed at which alcohol is absorbed into the body.

So in the short term it will lead to a lower concentration of alcohol in the blood than drinking on an empty stomach, but it still takes at least an hour to get rid of each unit.

This means you are still at risk of being over the limit the next morning, even if you have eaten a big meal the night before.

The same applies if you have drunk a lot of water the night before. Eating and drinking

improve hangover symptoms but they do not actually reduce the amount of alcohol in your blood.

Men tend to process alcohol quicker than women because they have bigger livers.

Regular drinkers will also normally process alcohol faster than light drinkers as the enzymes in the liver that process alcohol will already be primed and ready to work.

Body size is another factor as the bigger a person is the more blood they have which means the more dilute the alcohol in their system will be. A man of 6ft or more can have as many as two litres of blood more than a woman of five foot.