

Strictly speaking

Our blogger **Marianka Swain** shares her highlights of this season's *Strictly* so far, from perfect 10s to dance disaaaahsters

Best in Show

Best performance

Runner-up **Sophie and Brendan's Charleston, Week 2** This early favourite set the standard. Sophie, the

only person who could possibly make a gold-tinsel onesie look chic, nailed a packed routine with stylish, Arctic insouciance.

Winner **Susanna and Kevin's paso doble, Week 8** Blackpool



Best performance
Susanna and Kevin's Week 8 paso doble

saw baffling Dadaist scoring ("For your samba, you shall receive 6, 10, 38 per cent and a pound sign!") from the overexcited



"This paso was worthy of its three 10s, with dramatic diva Susanna eyeballing Kevin as if wrangling over the last portion of quinoa houmous in Waitrose"

judges, one slice of birthday cake away from vomiting into their Peppa Pig party bags. However, this paso was worthy of its three 10s, with dramatic diva Susanna eyeballing Kevin as if wrangling over the last portion of quinoa houmous in Waitrose.

Best move

Runner-up **Fiona kicking Anton in the shin, Week 2** Arguably just one of Fiona's many,

many mistakes, but I like to think it was delivered on behalf of Anton's former partners, reducing him to a collective punching bag.

Winner **Iveta's inexplicable slow-mo leg lift/crotch flash, most weeks** Trying to seduce the judges? Distract from her partner's errors? Or JUST BECAUSE SHE CAN? Trademark move from this strong contender for favourite new

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pro (gloriously nutty concepts delivered totally deadpan).

Best costume

Highly commended **Mark and Iveta's psychedelic eruption, Week 2** Ever wanted to see a piece of clothing suffer a stroke? YOU HAVE NOW.

Runner-up **Sophie's ketchup pleather peplum, Week 6** Who knew condiment fetish was a thing?

Winner **Artem's Cossack action figure escort attire, Week 1** Aladdin pantaloons ▶



Series 11 runners and riders (from left to right)

- ★ **Deborah Meaden** and Robin Windsor
- ★ **Susanna Reid** and Kevin Clifton
- ★ **Patrick Robinson** and Anya Garnis
- ★ **Julien Macdonald** and Janette Manrara
- ★ **Ben Cohen** and Kristina Rihanoff
- ★ **Sophie Ellis-Bextor** and Brendan Cole
- ★ **Tony Jacklin** and Aliona Vilani
- ★ **Fiona Fullerton** and Anton Du Beke
- ★ **Dave Myers** and Karen Hauer
- ★ **Rachel Riley** and Pasha Kovalev
- ★ **Vanessa Feltz** and James Jordan
- ★ **Ashley Taylor Dawson** and Ola Jordan
- ★ **Natalie Gumede** and Artem Chigvintsev
- ★ **Mark Benton** and Iveta Lukosiute
- ★ **Abbey Clancy** and Aljaž Skorjanec

and booties fused with smouldering matador casual-chic. If that's not worth the licence fee, I don't know what is.

Best wardrobe malfunction

Runner-up **Patrick and Anya's American (less than) smooth stuck-heel botched lift, Week 7** Note to 10-happy Darcey: glaring errors do not equal perfection, mm-kay?

Winner **Patrick and Anya's cross-dressing Big Bird samba dramarama, Week 8** Len still called this a "whamba", because he has a sideline writing cracker jokes. And/or it had the surreally disastrous quality of someone driving headlong into a Snappy Snaps.

Best injury porn AKA victims of the Natalie Lowe Casualty Curse

Runner-up **Artem's comedy neck injury, Week 8** He really is the Jamie Redknapp of ballroom.

Winner **Natalie's fainting spell, Week 7** Honestly, I'm just surprised she wasn't carted off in a bedazzled wheelchair – I can only imagine a panting crew member wielding a sack of sequins and a hot glue gun arrived seconds too late.

Tess's dress: impressed or depressed?

Ah, Tess. May your blood feud with Wardrobe never end.

Most depressed: runner-up **Week 1** Her luminous custard-hued body-con was weirdly

Series 11 vital stats

Five new pros

Iveta Mad genius, when in Bond girl mode gives off the impression of being able to kill a man and "make it look like accident".

Kevin from Grimsby

Inverted *She's All That* trope whenever he puts on his sexy glasses #spexy

Janette Vivacious personality, great enthusiasm, but combined with Julien's tendency to yelp as if being electrocuted produced a Marmite couple: some people couldn't stand them, some can no longer hear.

Aljaž Ridiculously beautiful and also trained as a doctor, which, you know, might do it for SOME people.

Anya Victim of sentient tail feathers and a partner with less joie de vivre than Ed Miliband, Dana from *Homeland* and Eeyore combined.

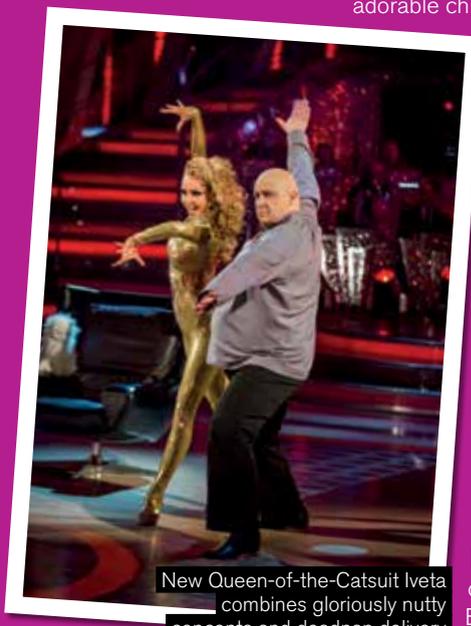


Aljaž: a hit with the viewers for some strange reason



Natalie and Artem have racked up the most injuries between them

Three new blogger gripes This year saw the addition of **faux fusion** (from Spanish sambas to Viennese dobles, with an added dose of furniture removals), **family prop points** ("Look at the adorable child! You don't want to see the adorable child cry, do you? WELL THEN VOTE FOR DADDY!") and **Luuuuurve Week**.



New Queen-of-the-Catsuit Iveta combines gloriously nutty concepts and deadpan delivery

We may never know why the set became a nauseating shrine to bargain-basement tackiness IN OCTOBER. It's up there with the great mysteries of the age, like what was really in that briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*.

Approximately 5,682 Brucie autocue blunders Plus that time he called Darcey Dave. "Well, it says Dave on the card!" Sure it does, Bruce. Sure it does.

conservative in neck- and hemlines, yet had the essential composition of a condom.

Most depressed: winner Week 5 Navy prom dress/crime scene tent with origami weaving and animal-attack slashes (her new stylist is Wolverine), plus hippy beach hair. If you can make sense of that combo, you get a gold star. And a call from MI5.

Best judging comment Runner-up **Bruno labelling Hairy Dave's salsa "Strictly Come Dancing Presents Crackers with Maracas 2: Falling off the Trolley!", Week 5** Also taking the prize

for **Best Strictly-related autobiography title**.

Winner **Bruno's "Sometimes it pays to be straight!", Week 1** Tonioli tellin' it like it is (and scoring runner-up **Best Strictly-related autobiography title**).

Best pro dancer tantrum Runner-up **Kristina's silent elimination rage, Week 9** The most painfully mediocre week of the series, featuring Blackpool hangover, godawful song choices

"We tell stories! I don't want to give filthy, dirty rumbas!" bleated Brendan as the judges turned their attention to Ben in a skimpy vest, oiling up his pecs"

and beige scoring, was briefly enlivened by Kristina's visible fury at the judges' decision. Someone's waking up with a severed Cuban heel on their pillow...

Winner **Brendan's "THIS GIRL!" howls, most weeks** The Pro Formerly Known As The Bad Boy Of Ballroom gradually shifted from earnest patronising to good-old-days brawling. Highlight: his epiphany that he's sold his soul to the light entertainment Mephistopheles. "We tell stories! I don't want to give filthy, dirty rumbas!" he bleated as the judges turned their attention to Ben in a skimpy vest, oiling up his pecs.

Best Claudia-ism Highly commended To Aljaž: "You're too good-looking. You need to turn round." **Week 2**

Highly commended "If Vanessa's waltz brought a tear to your eye... in a good way." **Week 2**

Runner-up To Susanna, having a luvvie "It's all so surreal" moment: "This isn't real. It's an elaborate home video." **Week 7**

Winner To Ashley re: high score following endless newborn chat: "That's better than a new baby! I'm totally kidding." **Week 2**

Read Marianka's weekly posts at www.dancing-times.co.uk/dance-today-blog