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# Lab Rats



Science up close and personal

Producer: Nic Guttridge  
4 x 30 minutes

# Meet the Lab Rats, who push their bodies to extraordinary limits in bizarre and sometimes dangerous experiments.

Shot in road-movie style, the series exudes the unique on-screen chemistry between Mike Leahy and Zeron Gibson as they become human experimental laboratory rats. Lab rat Dr Mike Leahy is the biologist with a PhD from Oxford University who will do anything in the name of science. Co-presenter Zeron Gibson is the comedian with an interest in science, but no formal training. Taking an avant-garde approach to science, and involving experts in each area, the programmes include testing the effects of g-force on the body, sleep deprivation, fear and male fertility.



## Able-bodied semen

Bringing a sensitive but important subject to life Mike Leahy and Zeron Gibson compete in a unique experiment – a sperm race! Demonstrating the competitive nature of sperm they compete to see who has the fittest, fastest and strongest sperm.

Focusing on male fertility and how it is affected by lifestyle, the number and quality of sperm are measured. The two men then have plaster casts made of their testicles all in the name of science. Who is the early favourite in the race to reach and fertilise the egg first? The climax of the programme is the race itself, filmed under a microscope, but screened in front of a crowd of drinkers in a bar. This race is a true first in television; one man's sperm against the other.



## Fit to Fly

Facing the most intense experience of their lives, Mike and Zeron compete for a ride in the awesome F16, the US Air Force fighter plane that can manoeuvre at a terrifying 9g-force. Special breathing techniques need to be learned so that a force 9 times their

own body weight does not push blood down to their feet. If they do nothing they will lose consciousness as the brain is starved of oxygen. Tom Cruise did not use this technique in Top Gun; under the g-forces of combat flight he would have blacked out and lost control of the aircraft. How will the Lab Rats cope? Training under a specialist pilot the rats undergo dramatic flying and stomach churning spins in a gyroscope.

Worse is to come in New Mexico, USA when they face the military centrifuge training which all US fighter pilots must pass before being allowed to fly. Do the rats still want to compete in this bone-crushing experience to win the prize F16 flight?



## Up All Night

Scientists have always argued over precisely why we need our sleep. Aristotle believed that sleep resulted in warm air rising from the stomach, while Nobel prize winner, Francis Crick, suggested sleep allowed the brain to 'take out the trash'. To explore a world without sleep, science maverick Mike stays awake for over 60 hours. A number of experiments will discover how lack of sleep affects his driving, brain power and sex drive. Zeron will measure the chemical, physical and medical indicators of his friend's condition as the hours of his endless day roll on.



## Scaredy Rats

As the Lab Rats face their greatest fears the aim of this experiment is to cure them in just one week. Mike and Zeron explore the science and physiology of fear using their own bodies. 'Flooding Therapy' is extreme exposure to a fear in an attempt to

overcome it. The rats' vital signs are monitored to measure their resulting terror. As Mike is scared of heights he confronts Tower Terror and he climbs 100ft up the ladder of a construction crane. Can he finish the perilous walk to the end of the jib? Zeron, on the other hand, is scared of snakes, so much so he sobs at the touch of a tiny worm. From worm to a huge boa constrictor, he is guided by experts through the physical and mental basis of his fear. In a truly remarkable transformation Zeron, trembling from a surge of adrenaline, finally touches a snake. Can he complete the ultimate challenge alone and will flooding therapy work when he has to sleep with pythons in the pitch dark?

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