

# Austin powerhouse

After years in supporting roles in Hollywood, actor Glen Powell is taking stardom in his stride and back to Texas to boost Austin's nascent film scene, writes Harold von Kursk

Glen Powell's classmates voted him "most likely to become a movie star" in their graduating year's high school yearbook, and their faith was justified when he finally scored a monster hit with *Anyone But You*, the unheralded 2023 rom-com that pulled in \$220m at the box-office and achieved a similar level of audience appeal on Netflix. The film turned both Powell and his co-star, Sydney Sweeney, into instant stars and he hasn't looked back.

Since then, 37-year-old Powell has headlined two big-budget studio productions, *The Running Man*, last year's reboot of the 1987 blockbuster that starred Arnold Schwarzenegger, and *Twisters*, the 2024 thriller that grossed \$372m and confirmed his bankability. Perhaps more importantly, Powell is now viewed as the kind of mainstream actor capable of gliding seamlessly between action films and dramas just as Harrison Ford and Tom

**Right: Glen Powell attends *The Running Man* UK Premiere at Odeon Luxe Leicester Square in London – after gaining the approval of Arnold Schwarzenegger who starred in the original**

Cruise did in their prime. Not that Powell is taking anything for granted; commenting "anyone who thinks they're going to be number one forever hasn't studied how Hollywood works".

"The best thing you can do is work as hard as you can, keep looking for projects with good scripts and the best directors attached to them, and aspire to be part of films that will leave their mark for many decades to come."

"The reality is that I've never considered myself the most naturally gifted person. I've never felt like someone who could just arrive on set and nail every scene. But I do know that no one will work harder than I do or have more inner confidence that I will reach that point. I feel that I've been able to raise my game from one film to the next. This is my time to prove myself."

Powell grew up in Austin, Texas where his love of the movies ignited his acting ambitions. Blessed with good looks and abundant enthusiasm, casting directors took an instant liking to him. At age 13 he landed a bit part in fellow Texan Robert Rodriguez's *Spy Kids 3-D* and four years later another Texas filmmaker – Richard

Linklater – cast him in his mockumentary, *Fast Food Nation*.

But in his twenties Powell struggled to build any semblance of momentum in his Hollywood sojourn. He spent much of that time languishing in an indifferent series of supporting roles – a stock trader in Christopher Nolan's *Batman* reboot, *The Dark Knight Rises*, a mercenary/expert hacker in *The Expendables 3*, as astronaut John Glenn in *Hidden Figures*, and most notably as an intellectual pick-up artist in the raunchy comedy, *Everybody Wants Some*, again directed by Linklater.

Powell finally landed his breakthrough role in Tom Cruise's 2022 blockbuster, *Top Gun: Maverick*. Having originally auditioned for the part of Rooster which ultimately went to Miles Teller, Powell caught the attention of Cruise. Sensing he could bring the requisite gravitas and

élan that Val Kilmer brought to the character of Iceman in the original *Top Gun* movie, Cruise had the writers expand the role of Hangman specifically for Powell whose six-foot frame and neon smile was reminiscent of Kilmer's screen magnetism. Powell capitalised on this golden opportunity by delivering a highly charismatic, scene-stealing performance that signalled his arrival as a future star. He has nothing but the highest praise for Cruise, whose work ethic and relentless pursuit of excellence left its mark on him. "Tom is one of those unique, exceptional individuals who pushes himself harder than anyone else on a set," said Powell.

"He is one of those Hollywood legends who lives up to all your expectations. Not only did he see something in me, but he encouraged me every step of the way. But what I most admired about him was how he mentored everyone on the set and wanted all the actors to look as cool as possible, knowing how the film could be a stepping stone. That's the greatest gift anyone could give an actor – the chance to showcase your talent." ►

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Left: Glen Powell on the sidelines during a football game between Texas Longhorns and Texas A&M Aggies at the Darrell K Royal Texas Memorial Stadium in 2025

Having become fast friends on the set, Powell reached out to Cruise for advice upon learning that he had landed the lead role in the sci-fi thriller, *The Running Man*. "When you have Tom Cruise's number in your phone, the best thing to do is take advantage of that wisdom. He's got decades of knowledge from being the greatest action star of all time. The best part about Tom is he's very generous with that wisdom. The guy always picks up the phone... He's always helpful whenever you need him to be. I could not have gotten through that movie without his help."

Cruise would later attend the film's premiere in London as a gesture of support for his *Top Gun* protégé.

Despite generally positive reviews and a favourable reception from genre fans, *The Running Man* remake flopped upon its release last November, earning only \$68m against a \$110m budget and \$30m in marketing costs. But thanks to the power of streaming, the movie ultimately reached a much wider audience and proved to be the most-watched film on the

**Above: Powell takes media questions at the New York special screening of the Netflix rom-com film *Set It Up* at AMC Loews Lincoln Square – he plays Charlie Young, assistant to high-strung venture capitalist Rick Otis**

Paramount+ platform and has been gathering momentum since. "One of the things that *The Running Man* has in its DNA is the type of story that I've loved: that of ordinary men up against extraordinary odds," he explained.

"I've always admired films like *Gladiator*, *Braveheart*, and *Minority Report* where one man sets himself the task of taking on a much more powerful enemy. [The original] *Running Man* was the type of movie that inspired me to get into this business in the first place."

Much to Powell's delight, the film also received the imprimatur of Schwarzenegger, who had previously worked with Powell on *Expendables 3*.

"I arranged a screening of the movie for Arnold and he couldn't stop talking about how great the movie was... He said if there was any of his movies he'd want to do over again, it would be *Running Man*. When he came out of that theatre and he was talking about our movie, he was like, 'You nailed it. It's perfect.' To get the blessing from the big man was as cool as it gets."

With five new projects in the pipeline, including major studio films directed by J.J. Abrams, Judd Apatow, and Ron Howard, Powell is fast becoming one of Hollywood's highest paid performers, earning upwards of \$10m per film. He's determined to stay away, out of the limelight, however, and has

kept his budding relationship with model/actress Michelle Randolph under a cloak of secrecy. He also remains close to his parents, Cyndy and Glen Powell Sr., who have long helped him stay grounded while making cameo appearances in his films. His rescue pup, Brisket, also helps share some of the spotlight.

"My parents always had a positive attitude about life that shaped me while I was growing up together with my two sisters. Our home

was always filled with laughter and that kind of spirit has stayed with me ever since.

"I'm still very close to my family and all my friends in Texas. Their support and belief in me is the kind of thing that helps you keep going even when there are long stretches where you wonder whether you're ever going to get those good roles where people can take notice of you. But they have all stuck with me and I'm just glad that I could finally come back home and celebrate the fact that their faith in me was justified."

Despite his emergence as a Hollywood A-lister, Powell recently moved from Los Angeles back to his Austin, Texas hometown where the rest of his family still lives. Austin is also ➤

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one of the fastest-growing cities in the U.S., and is now offering major tax incentives to attract film productions. Powell is anxious to help the city's entertainment industry rival that of L.A., which has run afoul of California's high taxes and growing homeless crisis, leading many stars to flee the state for more hospitable surroundings. "I needed a spiritual place where I could really rest and disconnect," he admitted.

"If you live in Los Angeles, where everyone is part of this, you can never disconnect from that app."

**Above: Glen Powell and parents Glen Powell Sr. and Cyndy attend the Westwood, L.A. premiere of the movie *Twisters* where Powell plays Tyler Owens, a charming but reckless storm-chasing social-media superstar**

"All my friends know that I'm starting to recruit my favorite people to come to Austin. Now a lot is being shot in Texas, and the competition is going to be even bigger."

Returning to Austin also enables Powell to reconnect with his longtime mentor Richard Linklater, the longtime Austin resident who recently directed him in *Hit Man*. This inspired indie crime thriller cum romance starred Powell as a low-level New Orleans police department file clerk who goes undercover as a professional hit man in a bid to track down criminals. The relatively unheralded film received one of the highest critics' and audience ratings ever registered on the industry leading Rotten Tomatoes site, and was further testimony to the laid-back actor's abundant screen magnetism. The prospect

of collaborating with Linklater on future projects is one of the prime factors that lured Powell back home. "Richard Linklater is the director that I idolised as a kid growing up in Texas," Powell said.

"During that time Austin was a burgeoning film community and Rick was at the center of it, really pushing actors and artists and other filmmakers. He was a God to me growing up. He was the guy. He made some of my favorite movies like *Slacker*, *Dazed and Confused* and *Before Sunrise*. He was an Austin boy doing it at the highest level possible. And he gave me a huge break when he cast me [in *Fast Food Nation*]."

"I just feel so lucky to be able to enjoy this moment where I'm reconnecting with Austin – it's reflective of this slow burn of how long it's taken from being a kid who took his first acting class at age ten to now being

back where I first got to work with one of my heroes. It just shows you that these things don't happen overnight."

For the time being, Powell is riding the crest of a wave that has brought him to the top of his profession and he's determined to stay there for as long as he can.

"What I've learned over the years is that if you remain focused and stay true to your ambitions then one day you're going to get to do work at the highest level with the greatest people in the business, the ones you've idolised all your life.

"Even when I'm at my most tired on a movie set, that's the happiest place you'll ever see me – working with so many talented and creative people and... doing what you love. That's all I've ever wanted – to be right where I am now." ■