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BBC wins battle for Christmas viewers

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BBC television swept the board on Christmas Day in the ratings battle with ITV, capturing nearly 70 per cent of the audience.

The most popular programme of the day was BBC1's *Only Fools and Horses*, starring David Jason and Nicholas Lyndhurst. With an audience of 19.59 million the programme, which has become a Christmas institution, attracted more than three times as many viewers as the highest rated programme on ITV, the American film *Field of Dreams*, which attracted an audience of 5.8 million.

BBC1's audience share was 61.2 per cent on Christmas Day, with BBC2 attracting 7.1 per cent of viewers. ITV achieved an audience share of 21.7 per cent, while Channel 4 attracted 5.2 per cent. During peak time viewing, from 5.30 to 10.30pm, the combined share of BBC1 and BBC2 rose to nearly three-quarters of all viewers.

The BBC also won the overall viewing battle for Christmas week, with an audience share of 50.7 per cent, against ITV's 34.5 per cent.

The Queen's Christmas speech, broadcast at 3pm on BBC1 and ITV, continued its downward ratings slide. With repeats on BBC2 and Channel 4 and taking account of video viewing, the total audience was 18.1 million, against 19.6 million in 1992 and 23.3 million in 1991.

ITV's poor performance reflected its decision to concentrate its best programming in the most commercially valuable slots in the days immediately prior to both Christmas and the January sales, but not on Christmas Day itself. Unofficial viewing figures for the New Year weekend indicate that ITV surged ahead of the BBC, attracting up to 50.7 per cent of the audience on the Bank Holiday Monday, January 3, around 19 percentage points more than the BBC.

Marcus Plantin, ITV's network director, said: "While we ceded the Christmas weekend, no other channel has ITV's track record of winning the other 51 weeks of the year."

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