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## Meldrew hits the bull's-eye for BBC

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TV's gloomiest star, Richard Wilson, and his comedy show One Foot In The Grave helped make it a Merry Christmas for BBC1.

His grumpy character Victor Meldrew topped the Christmas Day viewing figures as BBC1 staged a repeat of 1993, with the day's three most popular programmes, according to independent figures.

In second place was Kevin Costner's Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves; followed by a special edition of EastEnders.

Coronation Street was below par, however, with just under 12.4 million watching its Christmas Day special, and BBC1 had seven of Christmas Day's top 10 programmes.

The irascible Mr Meldrew proved more appealing than the opposition offered by Heartbeat's bobby on a rural beat, the former EastEnder Nick Berry.

More than 15 million viewers tuned into Wilson's show on Christmas night while Heartbeat had just under 13.8 million for ITV, four million fewer than usual, according to figures from the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (Barb) for the week ending December 25.

Costner's Robin Hood had 14.32 million viewers, while 14.23 million switched on for the latest events in Albert Square.

Rival attractions on ITV and BBC1 tended to split audiences. Wilson's programme had an audience of nearly 4.5 million fewer than last year's ratings leader, Only Fools And Horses. That managed 19.5 million viewers, but David Jason's Del Boy had scarcely any opposition.

Wilson also proved a star addition to the BBC1 Christmas schedules in 1993 when his show was the most watched programme during the Christmas period: with 20 million viewers on Boxing Day.

Other strong BBC1 Christmas Day performers this year were Victoria Wood, with almost 13.4 million fans, and Keeping Up Appearances with just under 13.7 million.

ITV's Disney film, Sleeping Beauty, had eight million viewers.

Viewers tuned in for an average of five hours and 22 minutes on Christmas Day, 15 minutes less than in 1993.

The BBC's overall audience share was 57%, with the commercial channels accounting for 38% and satellite and cable 5%.

BBC1 also had the highest rated programme on Christmas Eve, with more than 15.2 million for hospital series Casualty.

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"British viewers are still watching more television at Christmas than at any other period of the year," said BBC Network Television's managing director, Mr Will Wyatt.

\* Loyal viewers continued to tune into the **Queen's** traditional Christmas Day speech -- the simultaneous BBC1/ITV broadcast attracted an audience of 14.6 million, **11.5** million of them on BBC1.

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