
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

A barrel of laughs



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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Feifei

Hello, this is The English We Speak with me Feifei...

Rob

And me Rob. Hello!

Feifei

So Rob, what's that thing you've got there?

Rob

Oh this? It's a barrel [tapping on wooden barrel]...

Feifei

A barrel?! I see.

Rob

And do you want to know what's inside?

Feifei

Not really.

Rob

OK – well, if I just open the lid here you'll be able to hear [Opens lid and sounds of laughing] – funny isn't it?!

Feifei

[not impressed] You have 'a barrel of laughs' – hmm, and that is supposed to be funny?

Rob

It's supposed to illustrate today's piece of authentic real English. It's hilarious isn't it? And do you know what – the phrase 'a barrel of laughs' can be used to describe me – someone who is fun and always joking around.

Feifei

Really? Someone who is funny is 'a barrel of laughs'? But this doesn't describe you Rob – you're not funny.

Rob

Oh? What?! I think we'd better hear some examples of this phrase in action – and I'll show you how funny I really am...

Examples

I shall miss having John in the office. He was a such a barrel of laughs.

What a barrel of laughs that bus driver was. He made the long journey much more fun with his funny announcements!

Since I split up with my boyfriend, life hasn't been a barrel of laughs.

Feifei

So if someone is a 'barrel of laughs', they are fun – and an enjoyable person to be around.

Rob

Yes – the phrase can also describe a thing such as TV show. But come on Feifei, you have to agree, this barrel full of laughs is so funny! Listen to this! [Opens lid again: laughter].

Feifei

Hmm, it's a cheap joke but it's not funny. I know what you can do if you want to make me laugh...

Rob

Oh yes – go on, what is it?

Feifei

Why don't you see if you can fit inside the barrel?

Rob

Oh, right, OK. Well, that sounds like a laugh. OK, then, here goes... [Sound of Rob getting in] ... Alright, I'm in.

Feifei

Wow Rob – you actually fit in the barrel! That's so funny!

Rob

Hey Feifei what are you doing?

Feifei

Making you into a real life 'barrel of laughs'

Rob

That's not funny.

Feifei

It's hilarious! See you later.