



**CAN YOU TOP THIS? - OLD TIME RADIO - 1
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Can You Top This? is a popular radio panel show in which comedians told jokes. The unrehearsed program, sponsored at one point by Colgate-Palmolive, was created by veteran vaudevillian "Senator" Edward Ford, who claimed he was taking part in a joke session at a New York theatrical club when he conceived the idea. However, the format was quite similar to a prior joke-telling radio series, Stop Me If You've Heard This One (1939-40), which featured Ford and cartoonist Harry Hershfield as panelists. Many jokes involved ethnic humor told in dialect. Listeners contributed approximately 3,000 jokes a week. Host Peter Donald told the best of these jokes, each one centered on a different topic, while a "laugh meter" took note of the audience reaction. The "Knights of the Clown Table" - Ford, Hershfield and Joe Laurie, Jr. - attempted to top listeners with their own jokes, which sometimes presented an extra challenge as their jokes had to be pertinent to the topic. Any submission used on the program received ten dollars. Each time a panelist failed to top Peter Donald's joke (as registered on the laugh meter which went as high as 1000), an additional five dollars was added, so a listener could potentially win as much as \$25, though on many occasions Donald's jokes would score perfect 1000s which would guarantee the top prize to the submitter regardless of how the rest of the panel fared. Further, listeners were also given phonograph recordings of Peter Donald telling their jokes on the air. The panelists claimed that together they knew over 15,000 jokes. Can You Top This? debuted on New York's WOR radio in 1940. NBC picked up the show in 1942, and it continued 12 more years. Hosts at one time or another included Peter Donald, Ward Wilson, Roger Bower and Dennis James. Can You Top This made its first television debut on ABC on October 3, 1950 but only lasted until March 26, 1951. This version featured Ward Wilson as host and Ford, Hershfield and Laurie as panelists.

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