

# THE VANILLA GORILLA

INTERVIEWED BY STAN "RHINO" EFFERDING AND MARK BELL

The albino gorilla is extremely rare, but not more rare than the site of the vanilla gorilla. No one has ever seen the vanilla gorilla on the platform. With only a few slight (but extremely impressive) glimpses on YouTube, people are crowning vanilla gorilla Eric Spoto as the new king of the bench press. We would personally go as far to say that the bench press world has never seen this kind of bench-pressing power. We'd never take anything away from the power of Ryan Kennelly (biggest geared bench ever at 1,075), Scot Mendelson (all-time raw champ with 715) or James "Hollywood" Henderson who was the first to press 700 raw. We don't even know if big James wore wrist wraps for his attempt! However, this is a different type of strength and stamina on the bench that makes you speculate that Eric Spoto is on another level.

Recent feats of 645 for four reps, 585 for eight reps, and (in a Maddog Sling Shot) doing 315 for 62 reps and 785 for one leave us all intrigued. We are all asking the same question: "Who is this mutant? Where did he come from? Why are his forearms 20?" And we all want to know when he will step on the platform to prove his metal. Well, Super Training faithful, world-class powerlifter and pro bodybuilder Stan Efferding trapped the vanilla gorilla by hypnotizing him with a chocolate banana (insert filthy powerlifting humors here) to get answers.

**STAN EFFERDING:** It seems like you're in the witness protection program. Tell us about yourself.

**ERIC SPOTO:** I'm 35, 5 feet, 11 inches, 310 lbs. Born and raised in Long Island, N.Y.

**EFFERDING:** How long have you been training?

**SPOTO:** I started lifting when I was about 10. You know those old gray plastic weights you fill with sand? Well I used to lift those up a bunch. I got my first gym membership at 13.

**EFFERDING:** How did you get so strong?

**SPOTO:** It has been a long journey. I remember being 13 thinking if I could just bench three wheels (315) I would be happy. Then once I was in the 300 club, if I could just hit 405 that would be good enough. Well, anyone who lifts knows that once you hit that number it is never good enough and you think you are capable of more. I think consistency is one of the main things that helped me get strong, plus being born with pretty good genetics doesn't hurt. I see a lot of kids today that want an instant fix to add 50 or 100 lbs. to their bench. They think there is some secret exercise

or supplement they can take. They don't want to hear that its hard work, consistency and dedication. I always looked at strength training as a marathon event, not a sprint, slow and steady wins the race.

**EFFERDING:** You use to arm wrestle. Tell us about that and why did you stop?

**SPOTO:** I have always loved arm wrestling. We would have matches at the cafeteria growing up and I would beat kids older and bigger than me so, of course, you like what you're good at. Many years later I stumbled on some information about arm wrestling tournaments on the Internet and thought I would give it a try. I went to a couple tournaments won a couple decent events, but the wear and tear on your arm is so great it would affect my workouts way too much. I decided that I would rather focus on the bench press while the window of opportunity was still open and see if I was capable of putting up world-class numbers. A lot of top arm wrestlers are in there 40s and 50s so I plan on going back at some point.

**EFFERDING:** You are a bench press specialist. Powerlifters will want to know why you don't squat or deadlift.

**SPOTO:** I grew up benching, squatting and deadlifting. I was always a great squatter and bencher and, I would say, a pretty good deadlifter. At 19 I was 198 lbs. and hit a 465 bench and a 675 squat for a triple with a 635 deadlift. I blew my lower back out a few years later – young and dumb (no belt not properly warmed up) – and it's never been the same. Several years later I was in a bad dirt bike accident on a KX500. My right ankle got shredded so my Achilles tendon is about four or five times thicker than it should be. Long story short, I was told I would walk with a limp the rest of my life and wouldn't really be able to run or jump, but I can run and jump so you can't always believe what doctors say. I just started training squats again not too long ago but from all those years of heavy pressing I can't get my arms back to hold the bar. I have been using a safety squat bar and stretching my shoulders a lot so maybe I'll be able to squat again, you never know.

**EFFERDING:** It looks like you can kill bench reps all day long. What are the most reps you've done with 315, 405, 495?



**SPOTO:** When it comes to my rep work, I rarely do full reps. Anything over five reps I don't go to lockout for two reasons: With lighter weight anything 80 percent 1RM or less my goal is to keep tension on my muscles, and locking out takes the tension off my chest. Plus, that's just too much wear and tear on my elbows. So I call them three-quarter reps. I try to perform them fast and explosive without locking them out or bouncing off my chest.

315 lbs: 62 reps; 405 lbs: 41 reps; 495 lbs: 22 reps.

**EFFERDING:** When do you think you will compete in a sanctioned bench press meet?

**SPOTO:** I have my eye on a few meets to get my feet wet and get comfortable with the whole process of lifting under the guidelines of a meet. I honestly can't say a particular one at this point because I haven't decided.

**EFFERDING:** What's your long-term goal? What records are you chasing?

**SPOTO:** My long-term goal is take my strength as far as my body will let me. I am chasing the all-time raw bench press record of 715.

**EFFERDING:** What's your training week look like?

**SPOTO:** My training split goes like this:

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**Monday:** All heavy chest, shoulders, triceps. I don't do any direct shoulder work but heavy benching kills my front delts better than shoulder presses.

**Tuesday:** All heavy upper back and biceps. I really focus on row movements the emulate bench press. When I row I try to get in the exact position I bench press in. I do heavy rear delts on this day, too.

**Wednesday:** Heavy legs.

**Thursday:** Heavy shoulders, dynamic and rep sets for chest, medium triceps, higher reps, a couple isolation exercises.

**Friday:** Medium back, light biceps, focus on reps.

**Saturday:** Off

**Sunday:** Off

**EFFERDING:** How does one develop a gorilla-like bench press? What's a typical training day look like?

**SPOTO:** My typical bench night starts with flat barbell bench. I try to loosen up my rotator cuffs before I bench and in between each warm-up set.

**All one set of each weight:** 135x 15-20; 225x 15; 315x 10; 405x 6-10; 495x 4-8; 585x 3-5.

**EFFERDING:** That's a lot of work, biggs!



**SPOTO:** Not really, I'm not even half way through the workout yet. 635-650 for three to five reps. Depending on how I'm feeling, I will usually do two to four sets of that weight. After that, I pick a weight, 315, 405, or 495, and do fast three-quarter reps to burn out and fill with some blood. I take 5-plus minutes between each work set.

**EFFERDING:** How many sets of high reps do you hit?

**SPOTO:** One to three, depending on feel. They are often times not done to 100 percent failure.

**EFFERDING:** Okay, what's next?

**SPOTO:** After flat bench I will hit either incline dumbbells or rack lockouts. I only do rack lockouts max twice a month; it's pretty rough on the joints. Then I finish with some dips. For triceps I like JM press on the Smith machine.

**EFFERDING:** What are your three favorite exercises to bench like a mutant?

**SPOTO:** Bench press, JM press, Dumbbell press (flat or incline).

**MARK BELL:** Thank you for the interview, Eric. Good luck whenever you compete next. If you do break the raw bench record, I will give you the cover of Power! You will be the first and perhaps the last bench-only lifter to ever be on our cover. **PM**

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