

Don squatting in 1974

# THE GREAT DON REINHOUDT

BY R.L. MURRAY

Don Reinhoudt's list of power sports achievements is legendary: World's Strongest Man in 1979, four-time consecutive IPF World Powerlifting SHW Champion (1973-76), three-time National Powerlifting Champion (1974, '75 and '76), and current record holder for the following:

- SHW 2,298 raw total in 1974 AAU without wraps (AAU)
- SHW 2,420 raw total in 1975 without wraps (Eastern Open)
- SHW 934 squat without wraps or suit in 1976 (AAU).

**POWER:** Where did you grow up and where do you currently call home?

**DON REINHOUDT:** I grew up in Fredonia, N.Y. I lived in Brocton, N.Y., for 33 years. When I retired and remarried my wife, Pam, we came back to Fredonia.

**POWER:** What sports did you play in high school and college?

**REINHOUDT:** In high school, I played varsity football, basketball and track (shot put and discus) - I was All League-All Western New York in all three sports. I played college varsity football and track for four years; I was a starter all four years in college. I went to Parsons College in Fairfield, Iowa, where I had a full ride. I was a defensive

end at 6-foot-3, 260 lbs. in 1963. This is when I started lifting weights. My senior year I was the strongest kid on campus.

**POWER:** How did you get started in powerlifting?

**REINHOUDT:** I started lifting weights when I was in college, to play football and toss the shot put. In those days, 1963, no one knew anything about lifting, not even in college. We just had a room with weights; no bench, no squat stands, just weights. We only did presses and curls. I didn't bench or squat for several years!

**POWER:** What were your best lifts in competition?

**REINHOUDT:** I did a 950 squat at the Seniors in 1973 without any knee wraps. I got two reds and a white light.



Don chalking up

I did a 625 bench at the Seniors in 1974, two reds and a white (I moved my right foot). I did an 895 deadlift in 1975 at the Eastern Open. That was the meet I did 2,420 raw: 915-610-895 for a 2,420 total in 1975.

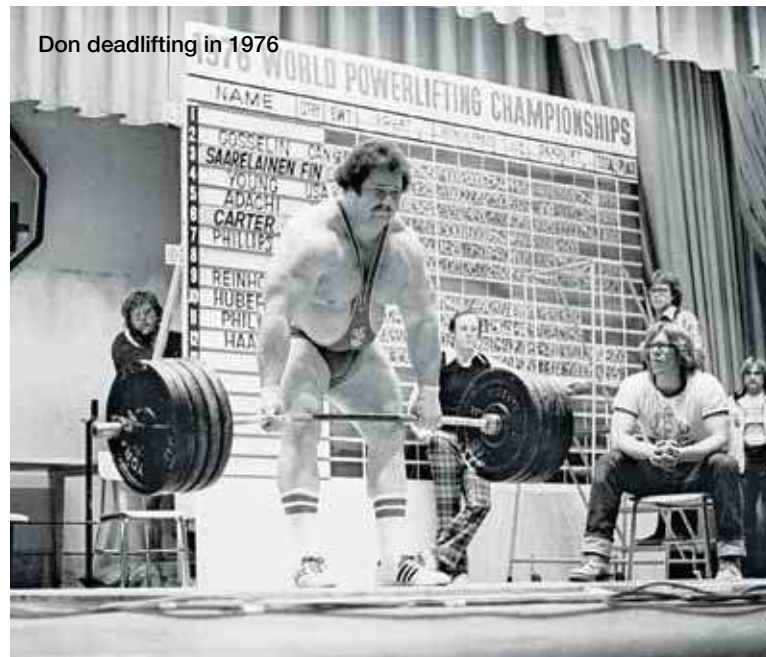
**POWER:** You've talked about some interesting lifting partners you have had over the years. Where did you train, and who with?

**REINHOUDT:** I had a gym in the basement of my parent's house. My now ex-wife Cindy was the World's Strongest Woman, and also my coach. She was in the 165-lb. class and her lifts were 225 in the bench press, a 460 squat and a 405-lb. deadlift — all raw.

I also lifted with two NFL players, Craig Wolfley, a 6-foot-3, 285-lb. guard for the Pittsburgh Steelers, and nose tackle Jim Burt, All Pro New York Giants, 6-foot-1, 280 lbs. I lifted with pro wrestler Lex Luger, at 6-foot-5 and 280 lbs. On my weekends, I would drive with Cindy to Pittsburgh and train with the Steeler linemen. I made some close friends from the World's Strongest Man contest who played with the Steelers at that time. All the linemen, both offensive and defensive, could bench press 500-plus. Jon Kolb did 560 and Mike Webster did 565. Steve Courson, a guard, did 600 lbs. That's when the Steelers won four Super Bowls.

**POWER:** What did a typical week of training look like when you were preparing for a major powerlifting meet?

**REINHOUDT:** I would train four days a week: two upper and two lower. I only did the deadlift once every seven days. I would squat heavy once a week and very light the



Don deadlifting in 1976

other. With my bench, I also had a light workout and a heavy one. I did a lot of curls and triceps workouts.

**POWER:** How do you think your training differed from your contemporaries? Can you share any training secrets?

**REINHOUDT:** I did a lot of inclines, power rack lockouts, dumbbell workouts and dumbbell presses. The most I did for a dumbbell press was a 200 lbs. press and clean. My best incline was 575 for three.

**POWER:** Who were some of your chief powerlifting competitors?

**REINHOUDT:** I had many outstanding competitors, like Paul Wren, Doyle Kennedy, Big Jim Williams, Jon Cole and Jon Kuc.

**POWER:** Are there any particular lifts made by other athletes that you remember the most?

**REINHOUDT:** I always felt it was an honor to be on the same platform as these guys. It was amazing seeing Jim Williams bench press 675 at the 1972 Worlds (just missing 700, disallowed for lockout). The crowd in York, Pa., went crazy. Seeing Larry Pacifico and Mike McDonald dueling at 198 in the bench press, with Pacifico taking his last attempt at 585 and winning, along with setting the world record. Jon Kuc's total of 2,350 at the 1972 Worlds. I have so many great memories, making friends and meeting people.

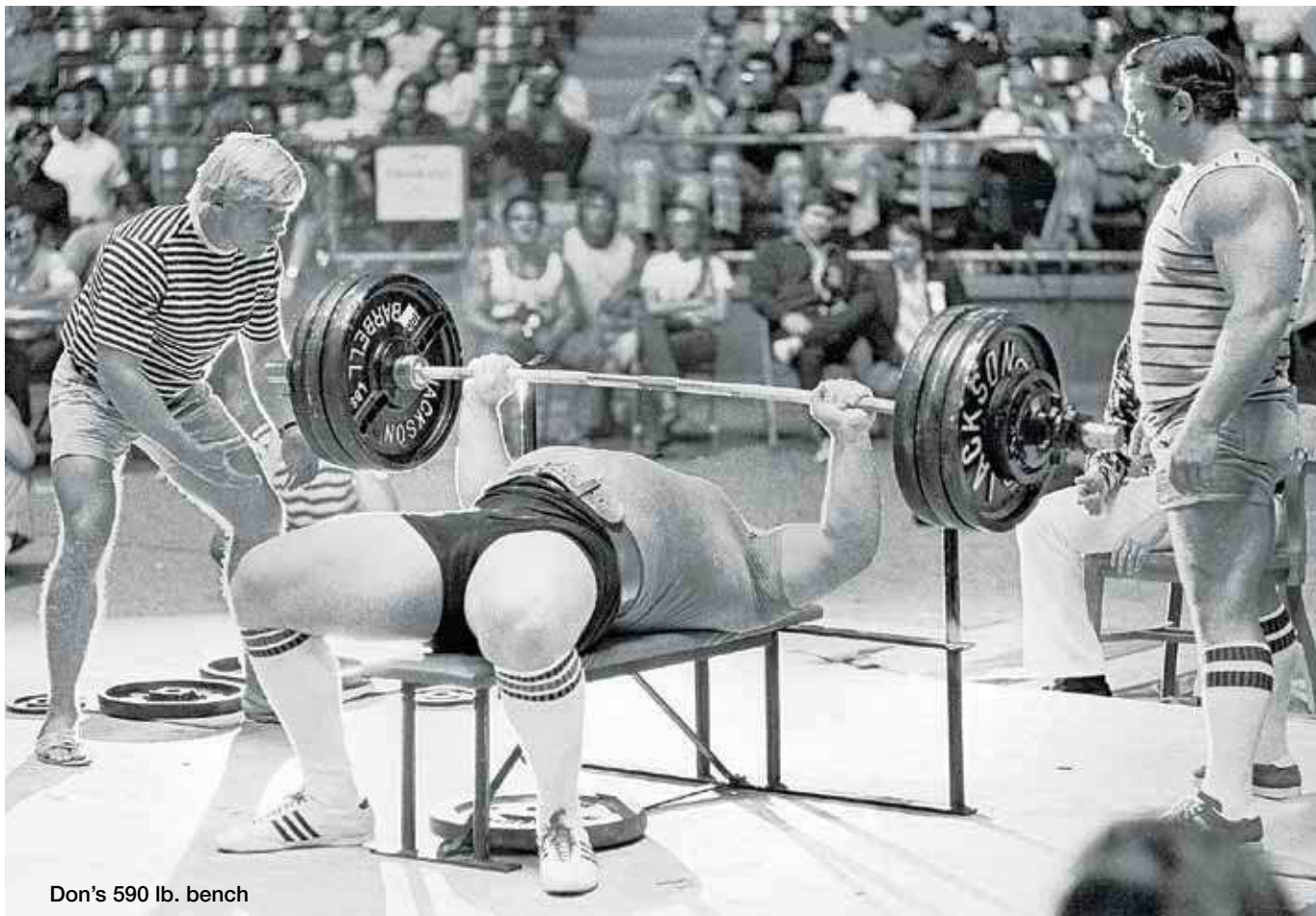
**POWER:** What is your most memorable experience at a major powerlifting meet?

**REINHOUDT:** At the Worlds in 1973, I took 590 in the bench and Cindy came out and handed off to me. The crowd went wild. At first the judges were not going to allow a woman to hand off, but after I pressed the issue, stating she was my training partner, they allowed it. Once the other competitors found out that Cindy was my coach, they began asking her training questions in the warm-up room.

**POWER:** Tell us about your transition to competing in World's Strongest Man. What was that experience like?

**REINHOUDT:** It was very hard! When CBS contacted me with the invitation to the first World's Strongest Man in





Don's 590 lb. bench

1977, I weighed a mere 239 lbs. After I retired from powerlifting following the 1976 Worlds, I lost well over 100 lbs. and had stopped training heavy. I was very excited to take on this new challenge, but I needed time to bulk up. They graciously extended the invitation and I began training. When I showed up at WSM in 1978, I was completely inexperienced at the events. In preparation I just did my power lifts with a lot of power rack work and a lot of inclines, presses, heavy curls, squats and deadlifts – no benches, just heavy inclines.

**POWER:** After your first World's Strongest Man competition in 1978, how did you adjust your training to come back and win the 1979 WSM?

**REINHOUDT:** I kind of knew a few events – the WSM was mostly leg and back strength. That was right up my alley: lots of squats, deadlifts and very heavy pulls. I also did a lot of power walking with 60-lb. dumbbells for around a half a mile.

**POWER:** We've had some interesting conversations with Steve Rogers (AAU powerlifting chairman in New York) about your WSM rivalry with Bruce Wilhelm. What was the competition like, and do you believe Wilhelm's antics (calling you "fat boy" in an interview with Brent Musburger and making disparaging comments about other competitors) helped or hurt you during the competition? Or were you unaffected?

**REINHOUDT:** Bruce and I were good friends, believe it or not. He was a great athlete and I had the utmost respect

for him. He was very smart and used his mind. I was much stronger than Bruce and he took me for granted. He tried to use his antics to get into my head, but it didn't work. None of the guys liked him; he was truly a smartass. We are still good friends though today and we keep in touch. Bruce didn't have any respect for powerlifters, thinking we were slow. Boy, did I prove him wrong! In fact, I believe to this day that I won the 1978 WSM contest. The tapes showed that I beat him at the tug-of-war; his arm was across the line and I thought I heard the whistle. Once I let up he pulled me off balance and then I crossed the line.

**POWER:** What was your most memorable World's Strongest Man experience?

**REINHOUDT:** It was the people I met. It was a fun experience, an entirely new challenge because you tested yourself against different athletes from other sports. Jon Kolb, for instance, was incredible – probably pound-for-pound the strongest guy there. He was a great competitor and very smart. It was through this experience that I was invited to go train with the Pittsburgh Steelers and share ideas.

**POWER:** Today there seems to be a trend back to raw powerlifting, making your achievements in 1974 and '75 even more impressive and relevant. What are your opinions of the geared lifting events that have allowed competitors to regularly squat over 1,000 lbs. and bench more than 900?

**REINHOUDT:** I think it is wonderful that many lifters are competing without gear. All of us old farts laugh at all

the gear and equipment that is being used today. Look at Jim Williams' 675 bench in 1972, Pacifico's 585 at 198, my 950 squat with no knee wraps, my 2,420 in 1975 with no wraps and suits. That speaks for itself.

**POWER:** You have been given credit for a total of 2,391 from what appears to have been a meet in 1975 (a video on YouTube shows lifts and the weight/attempt board). You stated your best competition total was 2,420. What were the details of this meet?

**REINHOUDT:** It was the Eastern Open, held in Chattanooga, Tenn., every year. This was Paul Wren's hometown and I would go there and lift with him. We used this as a warm-up for Nationals. Paul was a great guy and an outstanding competitor, and I always enjoyed this meet. In 1974, my official lifts were 915 squat, 610 bench and an 895 deadlift for a 2,420 total. I still have the certificate on my wall designating the World Records in deadlift and total from the IPF for this meet. Bob Christ was the committee chairman and the meet director was Jim Taylor. {Don noted that his deadlift record called for an official weighing of the plates, which reduced this lift to 885.5. Apparently, the officials then subtracted 9.5 lbs. from each of his lifts for a new total of 2,391.}

**POWER:** You didn't wear wraps in some meets. Did you wear wraps at the meet in Chattanooga when you totaled 2,420?

**REINHOUDT:** No. I squatted the 915 without wraps because the IPF had banned the use of knee wraps in 1973

and '74, but then began allowing them again from 1975 on.

**POWER:** Two or three excellent lifters are currently closing in on your all-time total record. Two of these lifters, Burley Hawk and Andrey Malanichev, have deep squats and their lifts are technically solid. How do you feel about the possibility of your record finally being broken?

**REINHOUDT:** I am glad that there are new guys challenging for these records. Records were made to be broken. I am just honored they have stood for so long. I wish them all the luck in the world. {Editor's note: Andrey Malanichev broke Don's All Time total record in early December with 2425 lbs.}

**POWER:** Anyone who knows you recognizes what a true gentleman you are and how much you give back to the sport. Is there anything you would like to say concerning your overall experiences in these power sports?

**REINHOUDT:** Thank you. I wanted to give something back to this great sport. I wanted to be a good role model to powerlifting. God gave me a gift! The Lord is most important to me. Without God I never would have been a strong man - I would have been a nothing. God deserves the credit for what I did. I had many great memories and times, making friends and meeting people. I loved powerlifting and I hope in some small way that I gave back to this great sport. I was very blessed and honored in my life to have been able to compete when I did. Those were good years for us all. **PM**

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