INTERVIEW

Personal dialogue between PL USA Magazine and the Sport's Greatest Names.

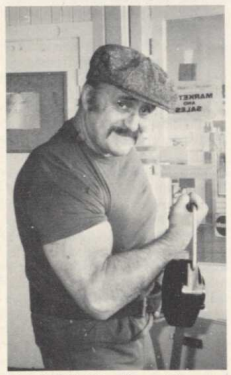
DOUG HEPBURN

the 1953 World Weightlifting Champion and Pioneer of the Powerlifts interviewed by Robert O. Smith, CFMI Radio, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

RS: *As a youngster in California, I was drawn to weightlifting through the inspiration of monthly reports in Hoffman's old STRENGTH & HEALTH about weightlifters like John Davis, Norm Schemansky, and a thunderbolt from the North, Doug Hepburn, who astounded the strength world with his 371¼ lb. press in 1953 that helped him win the World Olympic Lifting Championships in Stockholm, Sweden. Suddenly, my boyhood hero was the talk of strongmen everywhere. Who else could bench press 500 lbs., squat around 800 with only an olympic belt, a bathing suit, a t-shirt, and no knee wraps? Who could set 25 world records in the odd lifts and stand alone as the Strongest Man in the World? Doug Hepburn, from the Kitsilano neighborhood of Vancouver, B.C., Canada, that's who. Today, Doug can still standing press 270 lbs., bench press 360, squat and deadlift with about 550. Doug is drug-free and always has been. He's now 62 years old. I finally met Doug after moving to the Vancouver area to pursue a radio career. Doug has his own equipment business and a line of health food supplements. We started our talk with the phenomena of "explosion" in lifting.*

DH: I would say that it would be very difficult for a person to 'explode' if they didn't have a very fast reflex. Reflex is the cause of explosion. I think reflex has more to do with mental attitude than people think. To a certain stimulus you could probably make a person move faster than they normally would. Even a slow moving person could be forced to move faster if they, for example, used electrodes in the muscles of his arm. If he got a shock, his arm would jerk very quickly. Why then could he not make it jerk that quickly, or 'explode' when he lifts a weight? It's because there's something lacking in the transfer of that impulse to the muscle itself. Before you can 'explode', you have to comprehend what the word means. What I experience when I do a lift, if I was to 'explode', and I've done it many times with a heavy press, is when I commence the lift, I don't know anything until it's over my head. I'm unaware of what happens at the start. I go black. The concentration of my mind becomes so pinpointed that the sense of awareness of the outside environment disappears. This constitutes a complete 'direction' of power. Another thing I could do, which powerlifters can practice, is sit in a chair, motionless, in front of the barbell that I was going to lift. I used to do the standing press and I'd take it off the racks and push out 400 lbs. or whatever it was. I'd sit and look at this bar and not move a muscle and I could bring my pulse rate up to about 150. It was repetitive psyching, and, as with Pavlov's dogs, it became a conditioned response.

I would say that the greatest force can only result from a state of complete relaxation. A man needs one fraction of time before he commences his all-out effort, when he should be under a state of complete relaxation. If the muscles are relaxed, you have a greater 'length' of contractual drive. If you get more speed from the start of the contraction and more distance to contract, you're going to have a greater speed at the point when you push the bar through the lift. I say don't get yourself tense when you start, but begin from a point of complete relaxation, mind and body, and then suddenly explode.



He's Still Got 'Em*..Doug, 62, pumps on the Dynatron. He reportedly had 23 inchers in the famous portrait (right) of Doug in his heavier days.*

Doug Hepburn*...was credited with amazing strength feats by Iron Game Historian Emeritus Dave Willoughby: 2 hand press, off rack - 440; 2 hand military curl - 260; bench press 535 (in 1954, weighing 290, 580 wide grip); squat - 760, deadlift - 705, one hand deadlift with the Cyr dumbbell.*

RS: *When I asked Doug about diet, he had a message that really summed up a wise philosophy for masters lifters.*

DH: This is a fact of diet. I'll try and put it as simply as I can. When you get over a certain age in life, certain life processes reverse themselves. When you're younger, let's say before the age of 50, the more you eat, the stronger you can get. When I was young I used to eat and my system could absorb it and I used to build up strength. However, but when you get over a certain age in life, it varies with the individual depending on condition, mental outlook, and so on, there's a reversal that takes place where the body is literally, to some extent, dying more than it's living. From birth to death we have the two extremes. Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes is a point where the latter portion of one's life is taking precedence over the beginning. What I discovered is this: if a person continues with the eating habits they acquired building strength, beyond the age of between 40-50, the process will reverse itself, and they won't get stronger from it; they'll make themselves sick.

The strength in the latter age of life comes not from the food you eat, that's secondary. It comes from vitality. Vitality is dependent upon the amount of food you eat. If you overeat, you detract from your vitality. For example, if somebody could do a transplant and put the internal organs of the young man into my body, the muscle, even at 62, would begin to develop. What happens is as you become older, your body loses the ability to absorb food, If you keep putting it in, and there's no absorption taking place, it builds up toxic waste, which causes disease. Most people literally eat themselves to death. I've experimented on myself, and I've found out that if I've gone all day and eaten very little, I'm stronger than if I eat a lot.

Through the conditions of our society, the way that we live, and the way that we're brought up, we form habits, including eating habits. They go much deeper than we think. For example, a man of 50 years may be sitting at the table and he's actually eating too much, but his children are there, and his wife is a wonderful cook, so he's gobbling it up and digging his grave. What would people think if the man suddenly threw up his hands and said 'This is it. I'm not going to go this route and end up sick. I don't want any more. I want to eat when my body tells me to eat.' Now, this is a very important thing. When a man's older, he should only eat when his body tells him to eat. You do not eat just because it's a certain hour of the day, and it's supposed to be breakfast, dinner, or supper time. That's a killer.

RS: *As powerlifters we have idols like Doug Hepburn, Paul Anderson, Bill Kazmaier, Larry Pacifico and the like, but who started the inspiration going in Doug Hepburn?*

DH: You know who my idol was? John Grimek. Yes sir, that was my idol. That's the man, when I was young, who influenced me more than any other. I've been in John Grimek's house and he cooked breakfast for me once. He was my idol.

RS: *What about Bob Hoffman?*

DH: I first met Bob Hoffman when I went to York. He did an awful lot for weightlifting, but he was very particular about his American team. Being a Canadian, he accepted me, but I still wasn't one of his boys, let's put it that way. He did say to me 'Through your lifting and what you've done, your internal organs are not any more those of an ordinary man.'

RS: *What did he mean?*

DH: He meant that my digestive system, my heart, my lungs, were those of a super person. Partially from genetics, but heavy squatting influences those internal organs, they function better, you get 'taller' in there. Especially in the apparatus that develops muscle tissue in the body.

Doug *gets acquainted with PL USA. Among his many talents, Doug is an excellent singer, and has done some recordings. Robert O. says he almost sounds like Elvis!*

RS: *Today, his close friends know Doug as a singer, poet, reader of fine literature, avid bike rider, cartoonist, non-drinker, non-smoker, and an inventor. He has a gadget for sale similar to the Marine Corps exerciser of yore, but more versatile and compact, and something that's serious exercise equipment, the Dynatron. It's not to be scoffed at.*

DH: The Dynatron will build muscle. It will pump it even more than a weight sometimes. I have guys make gains on it. It's more than what it seems to be. I've got the United States patent granted on it. I also own all the tooling, the injections molds and so forth. With backing I could turn out about 4800 of those units every 2 days. To some extent it will replace the barbell, and I'm not just saying that because I invented it.

RS: *What about training the deadlift, for instance?*

DH: You wouldn't be able to do a heavy deadlift, but you could do a front squat. By holding the bar up it will work your legs. It won't go up over 200-250 lbs, but because you don't have to stop the exercise to change the load, you can keep going. It gives you a new dimension in training because you can do a set, turn the dial back, and continue. In a given period of time, you can almost double your workload.

I have other machines I've invented. There's something that once came to mind, a powerlifting machine. It's a big bar, on chains, with a big dial in between and you can turn the dial and go up to 2000 lbs. A guy could be doing 1000 lb. squats in the living room of his house. This machine would allow you to do something that's very unusual. You could pull yourself down into the squat. Ever use those muscles before?

I'll tell you what I found out. A guy was training on squats heavy, but he didn't have the physical condition to go through a routine on the machine. It was too tiring. It was harder."

RS: *Have you built a prototype?*

DH: I built them before. I had a man who was going for the Olympics in weightlifting. He was a Canadian champion and he did 10 heavy squats on that machine and he had to go right out. When you're squatting on it, you can't speed it up, you've got to fight it all the way, full resistance, like pushing against a hydraulic machine. It's very tiring. The Canadian coach told me the Bulgarians had similar machines. If somebody was interested in developing it, and they wanted to give me a small amount of capital, not much, maybe a couple thousand dollars, I'd build a prototype. They would share in this prototype. It would be theirs.

RS: *What about support gear? (Doug didn't even know about bench shirts.)*

DH: What are these fellas trying to prove by doing this? You know, the next thing is the guy will have springs under his armpit. Then, in the next step, they're going to have some bionic batteries in their back or something. I did a cartoon on that already. What are these men trying to prove? We're getting away from it. We'll get all these different brands and simply say that the man with the best 'spring' won on the bench because he's got this new rubber from the Burmese jungle and it's putting 5 lbs. 2 oz. more drive on his press. This poor guy's just standing there, he's a computer. All they're doing is putting them on and there's no lifters anymore; it's a battle of products. It's like Indianapolis. The drivers are good, but did the car win or did he?

RS: *How about your training courses?*

DH: I sold quite a few of them. It's a cheap little book, just information. In *IRON MAN* I mentioned the names of 2 young boys that had bought my bench press book, unknowns. One was Pat Casey. The young kid bought my course on the bench when he was nothing. He says, "I used that." Paul Anderson asked me for training advice. He once wrote me a letter from England asking me for a training device for strength.

RS: *Doug Hepburn, being the kind of guy he is, will lift until he drops. That's his heritage. He's expressed interest in competing in a pure masters over 60 meet and would like to have the incentive to really pour it on, so all of you fans out there should write him at 38 E. Fourth, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5T 1E8, and encourage him in his comeback. Also, if you are interested in the Dynatron, or are the backer for the powerlifting machine we wished for earlier in the article call Doug at (604) 873-3684. That's his funky warehouse, and home of 'Sri' Hepburn, the real masters champ of the holy one arm press. I am very happy to be able to to tell you that this Renaissance Man of the Iron Game, who inspired so many of us in the past, is still happy and strong, alive and well, and ready to break some more records.*

Robert O. Smith *was a promising lifter as a teenager, and he has since followed the Iron Game with enthusiasm. When not broadcasting at Vancouver's top rock station, 101-CFMI, he's either working out (planning his own comeback!) or drawing some of the clever cartoons you have seen in previous issues of POWERLIFTING USA. (This interview with Doug Hepburn was conducted at the Vancouver Health Food Restaurant, and a 7½ minute version of this interview was broadcast on CFMI's public affairs show "In Touch")*

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