

INSPIRE

James Crompton

Arguably the most technically accurate slalom skier on the Mens World Cup Tour, Dave Ryding is Great Britain's most successful Alpine Skier. In slalom Dave is currently ranked #11 in the world, won the Europa Cup title in 2013 and has three World Cup podiums to his name, including a third place in Adelboden in January this year. What makes the 3x Olympian's remarkable achievements all the more impressive is that Dave grew up skiing on a dry slope in North West England and only raced on snow for the first time aged 16.

I've known Dave since the age of ten. We grew up racing together with his sister, Jo, and father, Carl, who was our coach at Pendle Ski Club in the UK. He's been my biggest inspiration and hero since that day. But as the age-old saying goes, if you can't do it... teach it! And that's where our tracks in the ski industry took different courses.

Whilst Dave still competes at the age of 34, I've been teaching skiing for the last 16 years. Our paths now cross most years when I'm doing early season work in Val d'Isere and the World Cup tour visits town. In all this time I've never really asked Dave about the memories of the first time he put skis on. So I thought that would make a good starting point when I caught up with him on a rare day off ahead of the World Championships this month:





photo: Marc Amann for GB Snowsport

“I enjoyed it that much and I try and credit the lady who was my first instructor, a lady called Jeanette, at Pendle Ski Club [a 160m long dry slope in the UK] this lovely lady. I think I was 6 years old and she made it so much fun that I was itching to get back there just to see her and try and ski again. She really instilled something in me that I still remember. I’d love to meet her again, I wouldn’t know where to start looking.

“There were four or five kids in it. It was sunny - that’s not normal at Pendle, as I came to find out! It was just fun... I had this goal from my parents that

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if I got good at skiing I could go on holiday with them. And I was sick of getting left behind at home with my nanna and grandad, as nice as they are, I would love to go skiing, so that was that!”

The most determined and disciplined person I know, Dave is an athlete who speaks very strongly of

making training fun. Whatever level, right from children learning for the first time:

“100%, have lessons. 100%. First they’ve got to enjoy it... One thing I’ve seen over time is pushy parents, it doesn’t help their kids. You need to let their coach do most of the work on the snow, and then support them in getting them there, you need to keep the morale high if they’ve maybe had a bad day on the slopes... That’s one thing my parents always did for me, was be there to support.”

How we balance training is often a contentious issue

between coaches and parents, especially for younger part-time athletes involved in Interschools races in Australia who’s parents often want them to purely train gates during their coach-contact time. I asked Dave how he balanced free-skiing with gate-training as he grew up. His insight will resonate with many coaches and across different sports:

“My first snow camp was actually through the schools system in the UK. There were a lot of people doing the schools racing in Britain as well but not a lot progressed into the club environment. I think that’s an area that they could certainly work on.



photo: Dave & Jo Ryding

“Even now in the summer for me... I actually more look forward to the technical work in the free-skiing than I do the gates. Before most of the sessions on the glaciers, me and Tristan or Jai or whoever’s with me on the day, we do maybe six, seven targeted free-ski runs where I’m not just hammering down free-skiing, I’ve got the GS skis on or the slalom skis on and I’m trying to make fundamental changes to my skiing then. Quite often video from the front or behind, stopping after three turns, or stopping after 20 turns, or two skidded turns, whatever it maybe.

“That’s where I try and do my technical-focused work, not in the gates. When I’m in the gates you’re working more on the line or certain aspects. You can’t really change fundamental problems with your skiing in the gates... For my time in the summer, it’s probably 60% free-skiing and 40% gates. I’m more looking forward to the free-skiing on my personal side, because I know it’s where I make my fundamental changes.”

I was interested to hear who inspires my inspiration. Growing up as kids, we both idolised Alain Baxter who skied into third place

in the mens slalom in the Olympic Games at Salt Lake City in 2002. Dave and Alain competed together on the British Team until Alain retired in 2008/09. Afterwards Dave enjoyed watching French technical specialists Jean-Baptiste Grange and Julien Lizeroux:

“He’s got the best touch on the World Cup, Grange. The more I watch Grange the more I see this, it almost looks effortless, he stands so nicely on his skis... it’s incredible to watch, certainly when you’re on the same conditions as him and you’re fighting like a beaver to get down there...”

“You can’t really change fundamental problems with your skiing in the gates”

“Right now, who do I aspire to? I recognise all these top guys as top level and I can learn from all of them. The level is incredible at the moment, how tight it all is. Ok, there’s no Marcel Hirscher and Henrik’s slipped probably back a little bit from where he was a few years ago. So it’s crazy tight and each race you’re inspired by someone else.”

We chatted for over an hour and it was great to catch up. We’ve skied together on dry slopes and in the European Alps, but I had one last question to put to Dave... what about coming down for a ski amongst the gum trees?

“When you allow people to water pistes, close pistes off and not have to open them to the public at 9 o’clock in the morning! Because I don’t wanna stop training at 9am, that’s half way through a session!

I would love to come to Australia or New Zealand, but I’m terrible with jet-lag. I don’t even go to, say, Chile or New Zealand anymore, because with just doing slalom, the glaciers [in Europe] are pretty good. It just doesn’t fit into my

training schedule. But if you need a hand setting up a race training centre, I’ll come over after and we’ll set up a piste!”

Watch the extended interview with Dave, [here](#). We wish Dave the best of luck as her competes again for GB Snowsports (the National Governing Body for Snowsports in the UK) in winter 2021/22.

INSPIRE by James Crompton

photos:

- Marc Amann for GB Snowsport (pages 2/3 & 4/5)
- Jai Geyer for GB Snowsport (page 6)

video:

- Full Interview with James Crompton:

<https://youtu.be/9iptWaP9Mb8>