

INTERVIEW

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

George Nelson interviewed for Powerlifting USA by A. Francis Hatch

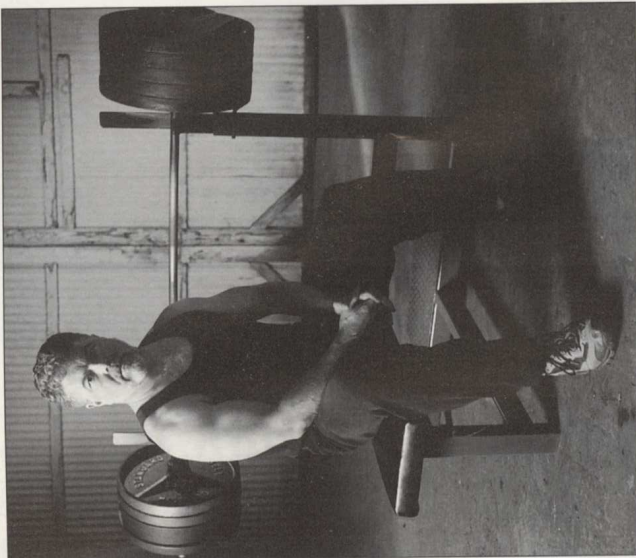
"The thing I dislike about instant gratification is that it takes too long." So says Master lifter George G. Nelson, who has shown little patience in climbing to the top of the World Master's bench press mountain. The world-record setting, fifty-three-year-old, 6'1" 242 lbs. bench press specialist didn't lift a weight until 1987. His first competition would not be until 1993 at age forty-nine.

Born November 27, 1944, in Angola, Indiana, Nelson moved to Los Angeles where he remained until age twelve. From there, his family made their way north to Seaside, Oregon, where he resided until he had reached his working years. A two-sport athlete in high school, Nelson excelled in football and track. Known as "King George I," he was an All State halfback and set state high school track and field records in the low hurdles event. Later, while serving in the National Guard (1963-1970), Nelson competed with the 6th Army Track Team.

A logger by occupation, Nelson started his own logging company at age twenty-four. A successful entrepreneur, he still runs the business today from the pristine foothills of the North-Santiam Valley just west of the Cascade mountain range in Lyons, Oregon. When asked how (or why) a 61" 240+ lbs. logger gets involved with weight training at age forty-three, he responds candidly by saying, "It was the only thing you could do in a treatment center that was any fun."

With a three-year addiction to cocaine and alcohol, George had checked himself into the Betty Ford Clinic in Palm Springs, California (his third such treatment center) and there encountered, not a great weight training facility, but "...about a nineteen-year-old ...kid in there, and I was... in my forties, and I'm a logger and supposed to be strong. And this little guy named Abtin... benched like three times what I did, and it just ticked me off!" So began Nelson's ascent toward sobriety and a series of world records.

Having "traded one addiction



George Nelson, Master at the bench press (Photo courtesy by Ernie Stoddard)

for another." Nelson began a progressive weight training regimen. "Actually," he admits, "the bench was one of my weakest lifts. I mean, starting out not knowing what a lift was really, and not having done any weights... I could keep up with a lot of guys with other movements, but with bench press I was just a weakling." That didn't last long.

In 1993, Nelson entered his first sanctioned meet in Auburn, WA, placing third. Since then, he's made remarkable progress and enjoyed enormous success. Nelson credits coach and seasoned powerlifting judge Terry Luehrs, with whom he has collaborated in developing his training regimen, for much of his success.

"He and I," Nelson says, "put

niques into a comprehensive training regimen.

"The bulk of it," Nelson explains, "is two days a week for quite a few hours. When I get into the middle of [a training cycle], I... go into three days. Tuesdays, from 6:30 to 8:30, is primarily bench work and accessories; arms, back, and so forth. Wednesday, in mid-cycle, I do legs. Nothing serious, just a good overall leg workout. Saturday is a 'heavy' day and I get into singles and go for form and technique. I'll start 'shirting' about five weeks out on that day [of the routine]. Never shirt on a Tuesday."

"In addition," says Nelson, "it's a lot of negative work and it gets pretty gnarly. At times, but it teaches you that you can always push a little bit more. You have to do [the negatives]. It's the only way you're going to get stronger."

A typical competition preparation Tuesday workout begins with an empty bar. "I always do the bar for about twenty reps. Then 135 for two sets. That's kind of the pre-warmup. I used to go to 225 lbs. and do another ten or so. Now he's [Luehrs] got me doing about 250. It's a pretty good jump but it doesn't hurt anything, and I do a set of six there. Then up to about 350ish for five. Then up to 405 for three."

"Then," he says smiling, "we'll do what we call 'Death Sets.' We'll go up to, say, 475 and do two sets of five. I only go for what I can get, none of this 'go till you stick.' But I always [maintain] a certain amount of bar speed. And that's 'light night.' It's really kind of heavy, and the only reason we call it light night is because we don't do any singles or anything like that."

"I only do this," he continues, "for about three weeks; about five weeks out. The last two or three weeks... I back off a little bit. Now, when I'm in the thick of things, on Saturdays, when we end up with singles, when we're really building strength, we'll go to the rack. We'll put on some terrible weights, like 780 lbs., and do lock-outs. Then

drop a plate off each side and bring the pins down two holes. When you have that kind of weight [on the bar], it's intimidating. But it takes away intimidation from lower weights. Once you've felt what really hurts, what you then have to lift doesn't feel that bad."

A typical competition warmup routine consists of: Empty bars 25x1, 135x10x2, 225x6, 315x3, 375x2, 415x1, 470x1.

Nelson's competition strategy is generally driven by personal goals, and he doesn't pay a lot of attention to what other competitors are doing. If he is going to attempt a record, he goes for it on his third attempt. In addition, he tries not to take more than about a thirty-pound jumps after a comfortable opener, which he considers an extension of the warmup.

As for diet, Nelson supplements his with "Longevity" vitamins and minerals as well as creatine mixed with "Pinnacle" products. DHEA he takes only in therapeutic dosages, 50 mg. a day. As a rule, nothing in large amounts except food! "And he believes supportive equipment 'can be the saving grace of the sport.'"

He explains, "As I see it, masters are the mainstay of the sport. They have the time and where- withal to pursue this sport, travel to

meets, etc. It's the only thing that's going to keep us together [physically]."

"I'm a bench presser. I think it's beneficial in that it's going to save shoulders and protect from injuries down the road to where masters can lift into their sixties and seventies. That's a great thing, and I believe it's just going to add to the popularity of the sport. I think bench pressing can grow, and masters are a big part of that. There's a reason that masters are coming out to play now, it's because they've got supportive equipment. Nobody wants to wreck themselves."

When George Nelson, described by his friends as "straight as an arrow" and "the nicest man you'll ever meet," comes out to play, it isn't always in the gym. He

"keeps a speedboat on the river," and rides "...a couple of Harley's."

Where to from here? With a record 530 lbs. bench, he has a short-term goal of benching 560 at 242 lbs. He won't elaborate on a long-term goal (doesn't want to jinx it).

Clean and sober for twelve years, and with twelve state, seven national, and seven world bench press records in his wake in just the last four, George Nelson is going nowhere but up.

A. Francis Hatch



Veteran judge Terry Luehrs (l), watches George Nelson bench a load. (E. Stoddard)

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