

Cover Story

"Spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sport - The thrill of victory... and the agony of defeat... the human drama of athletic competition... this is ABC's Wide World of Sports."

The best way to tell the story of this legend is to let him tell it.

In the words of Evel...

"Death is the greatest competitor in life. And I beat it for a long time."

"I'm a jumping son-of-a-bitch. I'll jump anything."

"Anybody can take off; it's landing that's tough. I never missed a take-off."

"Kids, don't try this at home".

"It's all in the neighborhood you grow up in, pal."

"If you don't have the guts to pull the trigger, you're in a lot of trouble, pal."

"I did what I did and I do what I do because I'm Evel Knievel. And I don't question it."

"It's really a life-risker. But people who have never walked a mile in my shoes don't know."

"There comes a time when you can't pull that pistol out of the holster anymore. You lose your nerve. There's no more fighting in the middle of the street at high noon for you, pal."

"I did an interview with this reporter once and she wrote I broke over 300 bones during my career. That's bull. I only broke 30 to 35."

"It is better to take a chance in life to win a victory or suffer defeat even though scarred by failure... than to live in the shadow of life as some do never knowing a victory or defeat because they have not the guts to try either!"

" -- Theodore Roosevelt quoted by Evel Knievel

His name:

"The first one to call me 'Evil Knievel,' was Nate McGrath. He was a baseball umpire, a friend of my family's. My brother and I stole his hubcaps and he called me Evil Knievel. It sort of stuck with me all my life. Later I changed the 'i' to an 'e'."

The Joey Chitwood influence:

"I used to go and watch them when they'd come to Butte," Evel recalls. "I was a young kid and I remember seeing a guy jump a motorcycle through a hoop of fire. He just made a little jump. His name was Cliff Major, he was the stunt rider with Joey Chitwood. And I used to watch him do that, then I'd go home and take the fenders off my bicycle, and put the cards in the spokes-pin 'em with a clothespin so it'd make a noise like a motorcycle. And I used to ride around and do little stunts on my bike...jump ramps, and I was doing then what the BMX riders are doing now."

His first motorcycle:

"I used to go and visit my Dad quite a bit when I was younger. He was in the Volkswagen business in Berkeley, and they lived in El Sabranti, outside of Oakland-he and my stepmother and my sisters.

"My dad gave me my first motorcycle when I was about 15. It was a BSA-125 Bantam, just a little bike. Two-stroke. Looked like a full-size motorcycle, but it was real small. The first motorcycle I ever had, and I still have it.

"I hit almost every mailbox trying to jump over them."

On his athletic career:

"I pole-vaulted when I was in high school. And I ski jumped. I retired the Rocky Mountain senior men's class-A ski jump champion-I won the cup twice. I've got a lot of trophies from cross-country skiing as well as ski jumping and track and field.

"I was in the infantry. Carried the B.A.R.-Browning automatic rifle. And I worked with Fandango torpedoes-torpedoes shaped like a big hot dog, about six-feet long. You trip 'em with a wire. I pole-vaulted on the Army track team, I ran the hurdles and the 220. The guy that out pole-vaulted me in the army was Don Bragg (the Olympian).

"I played junior hockey and senior A and pro hockey for the Charlotte Clippers. We went undefeated for two years. Then the team that beat us was the Czechoslovakian Olympic team. Our team was all Canadian kids from Montana State and the University of Montana.

"It's a tough way to make a living. Didn't pay very much."

On promoting Honda sales for his dealerships:

"They had a racetrack in Moses Lake. And we took boxes that held coffins, that were six and a half feet long, and stapled them together. We put rattlesnakes in there and then had mountain lions at both ends of it.

"I jumped 50 rattlesnakes in a 90-foot box and two mountain lions. I smashed into the edge of the box the end of it came out and the rattlesnakes got out. All the people ran like hell and I was on a motorcycle, so I just got the hell away from there. The snakes were crawling up the hills under the crowd. The mountain lions were just crouching around there."

On the sponsors:

"Norton was the first sponsor I had. Then I went to Triumph. I got hurt real bad in Tacoma, Washington. Had a severe brain concussion. Landed short. Hit the ramp, caught it on the rear wheel. I was riding a Triumph then, T-120 Bonneville. Then a 650 Bonneville Triumph".

Knievel has claimed that "the Triumph 650 was far and away the best bike he ever jumped with", however, "Triumph didn't want to pay me anything to ride their motorcycles. So Harley-Davidson stepped in. I signed with Harley-Davidson for eight years and they treated me wonderfully. They were a first class company.

"On the Harley I jumped 52 cars in L.A. and I jumped the buses. I jumped a jump in Dallas, Texas, over 13 Mack trucks and completely over my landing ramp. The landing ramp was 60 feet and the jump was 130 feet. So that's 130 and 60, it's 190 feet. I've jumped further on a Harley-Davidson than anybody in the world. Nobody's ever even come close.

"I'm sorry to say because they've grown so large over the last few years that they seem to have forgotten those who helped them when they really had nothing. There is no real personal relationship there anymore".

On inventive toys:

"Next year the Ideal Toy Company is going to make a lot of Evel Knievel toys. ... One toy I'd like them to make is my own idea: You wind it up, it goes like a little bugger across the floor, grabs Barbie, throws her on the floor, gives her a little lovin', jumps back on the motorcycle and goes whizzing out the door."

On white leather:

"I just thought that was a classy set of leathers to wear, and I hated black leather.

"It was my taking off the black leather jacket and putting on the white one. And it was because I'm Evel Knievel, all right? My promotional ability is mine, and there's a secret to it. And I'm gonna keep it that way."

On the Snake River Jump:

"There was a picture of the Grand Canyon on the wall and my friend said, 'That's what you outta jump.'" He was unable to get permission to jump the Grand Canyon, so he bought a piece of land in Idaho's Snake River Canyon and made plans to jump the quarter-mile-wide chasm.

He described the custom made Sky-cycle as "one of two that there are left in the world, there were three, one is at the bottom of the snake river. We fired a test shot out there some months ago and never did find it. The vehicle looks like a bottle of beer, does not have a tail on it, has 2 fins on both sides and has an open cockpit. It's strictly a rocket and it puts out 5000 lbs of thrust, 15,000 lbs of jet horsepower and 3000 lbs of total impulse. It will run 108 ft in 2 seconds from a dead stop." "I didn't think I even had a 50-50 chance to make it. Everyone told me not to do it, but I was determined to keep my word, so I climbed up and got strapped in. When I punched that power button I thought, 'God, here I come.'

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Outer Limits M C

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