

















## RAD DAD- Steve Matthews a Bad Ass of the backcountry

Bob Legasa

"It started in my blood when I was a kid in Canada. Dad moved us to Alberta when I was 11. He had enough of Miami and was ready for a new life, a new adventure. We had a big farm and it had a huge hill on it, we'd always ski and toboggan on it. One day I took to trying to stand up and ride the toboggan down the hill, and I think that's what planted the seed."

Steve Matthews is one of the original pioneers of snowboarding and even though he's been out of the sport as a professional for over 25 years, he's still greatly respected in the snowboard world as a badass of the backcountry.

Over the past 40 years, Steve has accomplished quite a few things — all stemming from that first time he hopped on a snowboard back in college.

"1980 was my first year of college at U of I. I wasn't fitting in that well with the whole system and I met a guy in my dorm that was kind of a skater, long-haired, kind of outcast," Steve says. "And he said, 'Hey, you've got to check this out.' He pulled out a Burton Backhill, which was the original Burton snowboard, it had just a rope, no bindings, and we went out on the U of I golf course. There must have been 3 to 6 inches of snow on the ground. I think we were out there until 2 or 3 in the morning. I was like, 'This is the funnest thing I've ever done,' so I immediately sought out a board and never looked back."

It's hard to look back when you're charging full speed ahead, breaking boundaries and helping pioneer a new sport. Steve spent some time in North Idaho in the Silver Valley in the early '80s perfecting his new passion. It was here he met up with some like-minded people like Kevin "Boog" Lamphere, Keith "Duckboy" Wallace and Jeff Yates, to name a few. This core group of guys pushed each other and helped evolve a relatively new sport.

Steve was always pushing himself to become better. He spent some time one summer on the Mount Hood glacier where he met the legendary snowboarder Craig Kelly. This turned out to be the start of a strong friendship.

"I met Craig Kelly, Jeff Fulton and Carter Turk, some of the original Mount Baker Hard Cores in the summertime at Mount Hood," Steve says. "Back in the day if you were on a snowboard, you were just instantly connected. If you saw another snowboarder, you had a place to stay, someone to hang with, and you instantly had that bond. So, Craig came over to me and we BS'd for a while, then he said, 'Hey, you want to race?' I was like, 'Sure.' And essentially, he kicked my ass that day and the rest of my life. I think there's only two times I'd ever say I had a better line than Craig did."

Kelly went on to be a four-time world champion. Steve wasn't into the competition scene but he had a real soulful connection being immersed in the mountains.

"I was probably one of the first to kind of take snowboarding to the backcountry," Steve said. "I had a love for the mountains and being free. Having this open gate to go out is all I needed."



Steve followed his own path and took to the mountains where he became the first to do numerous first descents on a snowboard. Mount Hood, Mount Adams and Mount Rainier are just a few of the more notable ones here in the Pacific Northwest. Steve tried to scale it up a bit, and with the financial help of his new snowboard sponsor, Burton Snowboards, Matthews set off for the really big mountains. The Himalayas were in Steve's sights, where he would be the first to ever do a snowboard descent.

"I picked a 20,000-foot peak called Naya Kanga. We were there about a 40-day period, and we made it to 19,200 feet. We never got to 20,000. We almost died in a kind of massive episode of cerebral edema and had to descend, and then while we descended, there was a big 'boomari,' essentially a cyclone or a hurricane hit the mountain and had crazy winds. We went back up to that high camp the next day and everything was destroyed. I tried to make a push for the summit, but the avalanche conditions were just nuts. I had one of the biggest slab failures I'd ever witnessed in my life and I was like, OK, I truly have to stop and turn around.' That was a really hard decision in my life to not continue on, but it was one of those moments you have where you are like, 'The next step will be death. I've just got to reel this in a little bit.'"

Up until 1992, Matthews was traveling to remote parts of the world challenging himself and exploring new mountain ranges like Mount Asgard on Baffin Island and the Dolomites in Italy.

Steve spent many of his professional snowboarding days riding blower powder in British Columbia while doing photo and video shoots for his sponsors. It was from those epic experiences that Steve changed gears and in 1992 he started up Peak Adventures, a snowcat skiing business based out of Cataldo, Idaho. Peak Adventures was now Steve's future. He and his first wife Terry ran and operated Peak Adventures from its infancy in '92 until 2011 when he sold it.

Steve wore a lot of hats in this business, especially during the startup days. "My typical duties were snowcat mechanic, guide, road builder, host, entertainer, food prep and lunch maker. I got out of making lunches quickly," he says with a laugh.

It was a hard business physically with the long hours and the stress of wanting to always please guests. In the early years, a typical day for Steve was up at 5:30 am, meet the guests at 7, do the waivers and avalanche safety meeting by 8:30, guide and ride with guests all day and then bring the guests back down to Cataldo. He'd then hop back in the cat and go punch in another 10 miles of snow roads through the night and usually get back home anywhere from midnight to 3 am and then wake up at 5:30 and start all over again. Thankfully, as business increased over the years, Steve was able to hire people who could help take some of the load off.

There were lots of great memories and a couple of life-changing days. "I had a guy come to me with tears in his eyes. His dad had recently died and there were these sunbeams that came down through the cloud. It was gorgeous looking," Steve says. "The guy pointed to the sunbeams and said, 'It's my dad, he always wanted to take me cat skiing. My life's never been the same since he died, but today you changed my life.' I mean, it puts tears in my eyes."

Then came the phone call.

"A guy called me up one day and he said, 'I see you're advertising in Silver Mountain ski brochure and you can take people in a snowcat to go skiing. Could you take me to a mountain to do an electronic site?' This is about two years before the advent of any cellular," Steve says.

"I took the guy to Wardner Peak, and then the guy who owned that site heard about it and two days later he had me go to another site out of Post Falls. I did that twice and I honestly made ... three times what I was



making a day with the cat-skiing business, all in about two and a half hours, and there's a lot less logistics involved. It's not quite as glorious, but I instantly saw, there's something on the other side here. This is legit."

Fast-forward 20 years where Steve is currently running six snowcats working in remote places like Yellowstone Park at 10,000 feet. For a while Steve was literally the only person in the Northwest that had a mobile snowcat and just like everything Steve does, he goes all in.

"It made it quite a crazy business, I was running both of those businesses at the same time. I honestly don't know how I did it. I'm sure multitudes of people saw me step off that mountain after skiing, climb in a truck, drive to Seattle, do a job. I'd get a phone call, 'Oh, we need you in Livingston, Montana,' drive all night, no sleep, do that job until 7 at night and then be back in Idaho to meet the guests at 7 am the next morning for cat skiing. It consumed every ounce of energy and time any man could have."

Ever since the sale of This incredible workload was starting to take a huge toll on Steve both mentally and physically.

"One day I looked in the mirror, my face looked like a skeleton, and I was like, 'Holy crap,'" Steve says. "I had to tell myself and come to the realization to slow down ... I'm an A-type person. You can't tell an A-pluser anything, because really if we put our minds to it and we're physically able, we're going to go accomplish it. But what I didn't realize was that you truly have the power to kill yourself, and that is something I had to really hone in on, 'I've got to take a breath here. I am going to kill myself if I keep this up.'"

Ever since the sale of the snowcat business in 2011 Steve has been able to maintain a somewhat normal work schedule. Yes, he still spends a lot of time working in remote areas, but he makes it his every effort to spend as much time as possible with his wife Kim, his young stepson Mitch, and Evan, Steve's 14-year-old son.

Steve describes Kim as the mortar that holds this brick wall together.

"Kim's really been a blessing in all of our lives, and she has this really wholesome desire to be in the mountains," Steve says. "She appreciates every bit of it and she lets me be me."

I have known Steve for over 30 years and over the past few years I've been seeing some of Steve's social media posts. If ever there was a "Rad Dad," Steve Matthews is it. I've watched his 14-year-old son grow up and experience many of life's exciting adventures in the mountains with Steve. Steve has been an incredible father and mentor to Evan, teaching him the ways of the mountains.

"I go overboard on most things, but I spend every bit of time I can with Evan," Steve says. "I try to be a 'Rad Dad' in many ways. I want him to learn all the activities, I mean dirt biking, snowboarding, mountain biking, kayaking I've got every moment planned out, Evan's like, 'Dad, what are we doing? Dad, what are we doing?' And to me, that's just magical."

When there isn't snow covering the ground, you can find Evan and Steve wrenching on their enduro motorcycles at many of the tracks in the Northwest where they're known as Team Matthews and when the snow's flying you can probably find Steve passing on his wealth of backcountry knowledge to Evan as they shred blower pow in British Columbia.

You'd think having a first descent down one of North America's tallest volcanos or snowboarding off a 20,000-foot peak in the Himalayas would be something etched in Steve's mind. Think again. Steve told me one of his more memorable experiences happened just last year.



"Some of the best turns I've ever had are full-moon powder sessions. I swear your senses are 10 times more keen when you're under a full moon, you can hear the stuff settle behind you. I was able to take Evan out on a full moon last winter, we were up at 1 in the morning, staring down a wide-open powder slope as the hoar crystals were glistening from the moonlight, the rip down through that with our shadows was incredible. Those are the good ones you remember and I got to experience it with my best friend Evan."

It's nice to see someone so passionate about life and family pass that passion on to the next generation.

I asked Steve if he thought Evan would eventually go pro snowboarding like his old man. As soon as Steve started talking I lost my cell signal.

Steve, you better get back out there, my phone isn't working.









Steve & Evan Matthews

TEAM  
MATTHEWS

Schaeffer's  
RACING OIL

#55

#111

TEAM  
MATTHEWS

CATALDO IDAHO

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Day  
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